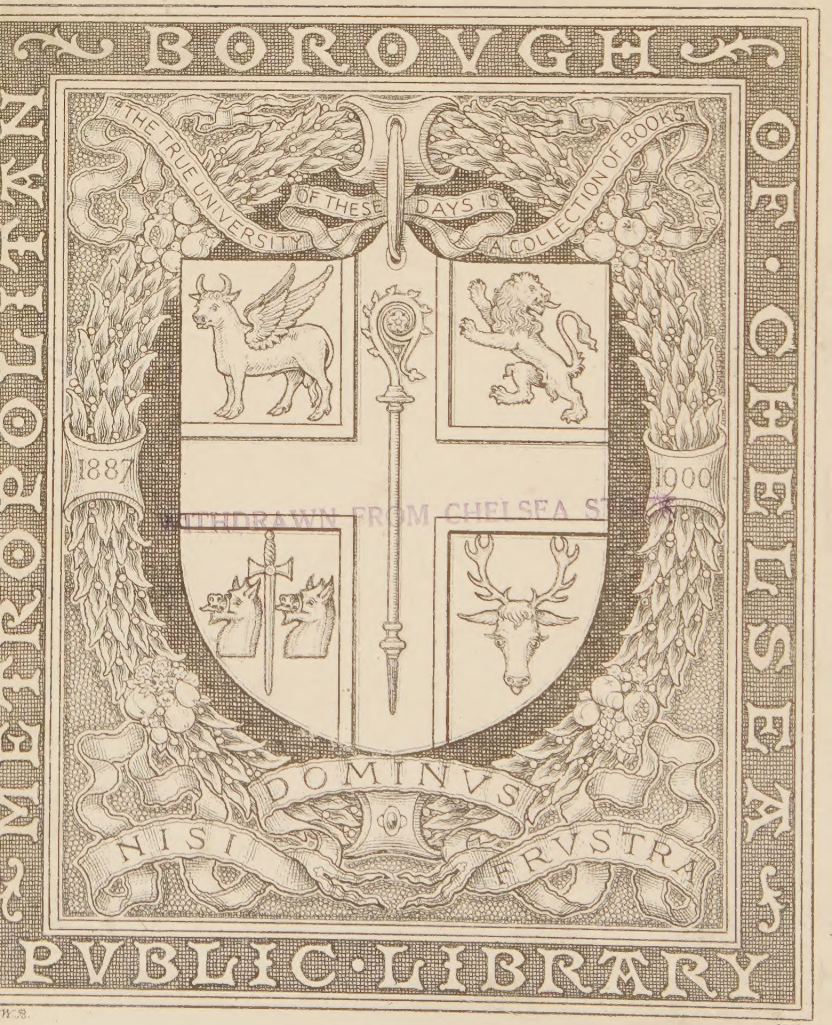
RAMBLES ROUND THE OLD CHURCHES OF WIRRAL

C. W. BUDDEN, M. D.



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RAMBLES ROUND THE OLD CHURCHES OF WIRRAL

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PLATE I
(*Frontispiece*)

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

OLD GOTHIC CHALICE
HESWALL

RAMBLES ROUND THE OLD CHURCHES OF WIRRAL

BY
CHARLES W. BUDDEN, M.D.
AUTHOR OF
"THE BEAUTY AND INTEREST OF WIRRAL."
"THE WAY OF HEALTH," ETC.

Illustrated by 24 photographs and drawings

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY THE
REV. CANON BROOKE GWYNNE, M.A.
RURAL DEAN OF WIRRAL.

LIVERPOOL
EDWARD HOWELL, LTD.
1922

To My Father.

INTRODUCTION.

There can be no doubt that Wirral exercises a charm upon all sorts of people. On the Dee-side, especially, it possesses a beauty all its own. It is also rich in Ornithology and Botany. Nor is it without historic interest, partly owing to its proximity to one of the most famous and ancient cities in England—Chester. It was also the high road, for many centuries, for troops passing to and from Ireland.

But the Author of this book, has, I believe, struck out a new line. He has given us a detailed account of most of the Wirral Churches. Lovers of Architecture will find, in these pages, much to attract them. It is extremely probable that many of the sites of our Churches are of very ancient date. We have ample proof of the existence of Saxon Churches

at Neston, Bromborough and West Kirby. One archæologist, of considerable authority, believes that some of our sites are even older than the Saxon period, and that there is reason to suppose that ancient British Churches were in existence here, in Wirral, before the Saxons came. Place-names are notoriously difficult to solve, but there appear to be names in Wirral of distinctly British form.

There are, perhaps, Cathedrals abroad which may be more beautiful than our own, but the Parish Churches of England are unique in Europe. For strength, picturesqueness, and architectural beauty, they are unsurpassed. They also have another interest for us. The Parish Churches were ever the centre of the social, as well as the religious, life of the people. Dr. Budden has presented this double picture with discrimination, knowledge, and skill.

As the writer pens these words, he is looking out upon a Tower which saw the dawn of the Reformation. Its bells rang in celebration of the wondrous victory over the Spanish Armada. They rang for Trafalgar and Waterloo, and this same Tower has housed the bells which, but

lately, rang for the victorious close of the greatest war known to History. What stories these stones of our old Churches could tell (could they but speak) of human life—its joys and sorrows, its achievements and its tragedies! Within these walls what prayers and praises have been offered, century upon century!

In addition to much interesting information on the Church Furniture of Wirral, the Author has given us, out of his full knowledge, a great deal of information concerning the customs and legends of our Churches and Parishes. The book is illustrated by excellent photographs, and also by some fine drawings by the Author himself.

We believe that this unpretentious volume will appeal not only to Churchmen, but also to many others who feel that the rich legacy, bequeathed to us by our common ancestors, is a common heritage.

The excellent Bibliography attached to each chapter will be a great help to those who desire further knowledge. It is to be hoped that every Church will be furnished with a copy of this Book, for the use of both parishioners and visitors.

I believe that Dr. Budden has succeeded in writing a book which is not only informing and interesting to the present generation, but one which will be of considerable value to the Wirral historians of the future.

C. BROOKE GWYNNE,
Rural Dean of Wirral.

PREFACE.

The kind reception accorded to the publication of the "Beauty and Interest of Wirral" has led me to believe that the present little manual, dealing with the particular beauty and interest of the old Parish Churches in the Peninsula, may supply a further want and prove to be a useful companion volume to the first. As Francis Bond says in one of his works, "This book should be pleasant to read, for it has been pleasant to write." It grew, in fact, out of a perusal of his wonderful series on our English churches, for it seemed to me that one might well attempt to do on a small scale for Wirral what he has done so magnificently for our whole country; and I was the more emboldened to make the attempt because, in all his writings, there is only one brief reference to Wirral. The soil therefore was almost virgin.

At the end of each chapter in the pre-

sent volume is placed a Bibliography which serves not only as an acknowledgment of the sources from which much of the material has been gathered, but as a guide to a further study of the subjects dealt with. With few exceptions all these books are to be found in the Public Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool, and in the Bishop's Library, Diocesan Church House, South John Street, Liverpool.

The arrangement of the chapters requires notice for it is not an arbitrary one. On the contrary I have indulged in a little symbolic fancy. Thus, after the first and second chapters which are devoted to the evolution and architecture of the churches to be considered, the third deals with the "Bells" which summon us thereto. The next gives an account of the "Churchyard," beginning with the Lychgate and concluding with the church porch, and chapter five then follows naturally with its theme "Wirral Church Dedications," since it establishes the sanctity of the buildings we are about to enter. But, as anciently no unbaptized person was permitted within a church, chapter six deals with "The old Fonts of

Wirral," and traces the evolution of baptismal customs; while chapter seven is in natural sequence since it contains an account of the pulpit, the vehicle of religious instruction, and the pew, the vessel of its reception. Chapter eight has as its title "Old Bibles and Books in Wirral Churches," so that it is in harmony with chapter seven. Still following our system of Christian development we arrive at the stage of full church membership, when the individual is at an age when the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper may be received, and so the next few chapters deal with the Altar and its environment, trace the evolution of the symbols and facts of Holy Communion, and give the local colour of the Chancel and Sanctuary. Chapter thirteen is devoted to an account of Heraldry in Wirral churches, and because heraldic panels and hatchments were not hung upon the church walls until after burial, such a topic is most suitably dealt with at the close of the volume. Lastly we come to chapter fourteen, "Stained Glass in Wirral Old Churches," surely a fitting epilogue since, through the medium of this form of art, we are given a pictorial summary of the Christian life.

I wish to thank the following for valuable assistance: the Rev. Canon C. Brooke Gwynne, M.A., Rector of West Kirby and Rural Dean of Wirral, who has not only written the Introduction to this volume but has kindly revised the M.S. The Rev. W. T. Warburton, M.A., Vicar of Hoylake; the Rev. P. F. A. Morrell, B.A., Vicar of Burton; the Rev. Canon T. H. May, M.A., late Rector of Heswall; the Rev. J. Nankivell, B.A., Vicar of Stoak; the Rev. J. M. New, M.A., Vicar of Backford; C. J. Tottenham, Esq., Librarian, Bishop's Library, Liverpool; John Harding, Esq., Librarian, Mayer Free Library, Bebington; Alexander Reid, Esq., and W. H. Tomkinson, Esq., the last two gentlemen having been responsible for the majority of the photographic illustrations.

CHAS. W. BUDDEN.

Hoylake, *September, 1922.*

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CHAPTER I.

THE GROWTH OF THE OLD PARISH CHURCHES OF WIRRAL.

"No soulless pile is here of mere hewn-stone,
Such as in Egypt's deserts lonely stand,
Reared by sad captives from a conquered land,
Cursing their tyrant's gods, doubting their own.
This rose not to the sound of bitter groan
And the thong cracking in the driver's hand,
At some stern Pharaoh's arrogant command,
That royal dust might turn to dust alone.
Above their red-roofed homes, their busy mart,
The fruitful cornfield and the daisied sod,
Where they had loved and wrought, and played, and wept,
Our sires, with joyous song and grateful heart,
Lifted this fair thank-offering to God;
Then with his blessing in its shadow slept."

J. J. Cresswell.

ONE of the charms of Wirral old churches is that of their picturesqueness; the more telling in that it is "unstudied, unconscious and spontaneous." It has been described as fortuitous, never designed; for these old churches were never built in the form in which they now stand. They were evolved. They grew with the development of the parish, as at West Kirby; they grew with the increase in the number of altars or chapels for altars, as at Eastham. They grew, like plants, in all directions. Nave grew and chancel grew. Says Francis Bond in his chapter on the growth of the English Parish Church, "It burst out to the north, and the south, and the east, and the west. It gathered on its flanks annexe after annexe, some large, some small; some of one shape, some of another, each bigger than its predecessor; nay, after repeated change of suits, they sometimes put in a new boy. There was no end to the haps and chances that might come upon a church that went on being used, it might be, for a thousand years."

"If we wish to think," says Mr. Fergusson Irvine, "of the beginning of one

of our parish churches, we must at once put from our minds any picture resembling what we constantly see to-day: a church rising in a few months, complete in all its parts, nave, chancel, transepts, even to clerestory and tower. In its place we must conjure up a vision of a little wattle and daub structure, standing in its croft beside the village, hardly so large as and possibly not unlike one of the smallest thatched cottages of our country-side, in which, perhaps, not ten men could kneel, but large enough to cover the altar and to shield the sacred elements from rain and storm. This is the tiny germ, and as the village grows and prospers, the villagers add a loftier and better building at the western end, and the little thatched hut becomes a chancel and the new part the nave. But still all is wood, wattle, daub and thatch. Years, it may be centuries, pass, until from over the seas comes some travelled son of the hamlet, who in Normandy has seen men rear houses of stone, as his fathers had done of wood; and he and his fellows go up to the hill, and there with their woodcutting axes, hew the rough sandstone into a semblance of square

blocks. And if you look at some of the earliest masonry in our churches, you will still see the broad wound made by the axe, before our English forefathers learnt the use of the chisel. Thus the building becomes more permanent, rough but sound and good. And as year by year England is drawn more and more into contact with the larger world across the sea, the skill and knowledge of the men who work in stone become more widespread, and the buildings more elaborate in detail, until, in Eadward's time, the Norman masons travel in bands up and down the land, rearing structures, some of which we have with us to-day.

Then the Conquest. And the new lords, with some of their new-found riches, build grand piles, like St. John's in Chester, and many another massive monument. And the grandsons are not content simply to follow in the footprints of their fathers, but develop the details, and the work becomes more ornate; and one day a builder sees the beauty of the pointed arch, and others follow. So that we have to-day not the creation of a single mind and the effort of a year, but the accretion of a millennium and the count-

less efforts of thirty generations; and thus one feels there is truth in saying, 'That church was not built, it grew.'"

To understand this growth, one must dive deeply into history. Now we are familiar with the fact that to-day we have two main types of churches, viz., the cathedral and the parish church, but in mediæval days up to the time of the Reformation there was a special class of church built for Perpetual Adoration. Instead of having one daily service, as was generally the custom in the parish churches, there was, in these, a long round of services by night as well as by day. Such churches were not primarily intended for congregational use. The daily programme, on the contrary, was usually carried out by monks, particularly those of the order of St. Benedict, but some of these churches were served by priests.

Of this type one example stands to-day in Wirral, viz., Lower Bebington church. This was what was known as a "collegiate church," that is a parish church where it was desired to maintain the daily round of services in use in a cathedral or monastic church. In such

cases the church was made "collegiate" by adding to the parish priest other priests or colleagues forming collectively a "collegium" or college where the officiating clergy lived in a common clergy house and had a common table and a common income. The head of the establishment was generally called the master, and his associates "socii capellani" or chaplain fellows, and the number was often twelve chaplains to the one master, symbolic of our Lord and His twelve Apostles.

But a difficulty arose as to the admission of laymen to the services, and particularly of the manner of summoning them thereto. For the chaplain fellows would be called by special bells ringing at all hours of the day and night which were of no use to the laity who did not wish to attend matins at 1 o'clock in the morning. They wanted bells for other purposes, such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, curfew, etc. The collegiate members, however, were averse to the bells being used for these purposes, and though, in some cases, two sets of bells were installed, it was generally found more convenient to allow

the laity to build churches for themselves. And so parish churches began to multiply and develop in Wirral as in other parts of England, though, in this connection, it is noteworthy that in Wirral the only independent churches were those at Heswall and Woodchurch, all others being under monastic rule.

At first these parish churches were very small and consisted only of a diminutive nave and chancel, then, as more space was needed, aisles were added or transepts built. The latter were generally for private use and had probably no symbolic purpose. They were furnished with an altar, and used as a private chapel for the founder and his family. As a rule the north side was chosen for the first extension, and it is to be noticed in most English churches that the northern transept is usually the larger of the two when a second has been added. The presence of an altar can be determined by the survival of a niche for a piscina as at Woodchurch.

In Wirral the addition of chancels seems to have been more favoured by private donors than transept building, as is seen at Eastham where a chancel was erected by

the Stanley's of Hooton, and since made over by them to the parish with reservation of the right of burial there. The nave was also frequently lengthened to accommodate more people. In such case the extension was generally towards the west rather than towards the east, probably so as to provide a baptistery. In Wirral the position of the western towers has prevented this, and most of our churches show a lateral extension by means of aisles, or an enlargement of the chancel. This latter has happened at Bebington where the chancel is much later than the south aisle. Alterations of this kind were, of course, lengthy undertakings and, as services could not be interrupted, means had to be found for the congregation still to enter the building, and for building materials to be transported to and from the site of the alterations. In the chancel of Lower Bebington church, at the north side of the altar, stands a small blocked-up doorway, the origin of which is obscure. It is possible that this was a passage way for the workmen when the chancel was being built. A somewhat similar blocked doorway exists on the north side of the

chancel wall at Woodchurch. At the same time it must be admitted that several authorities consider the Bebington doorway to be a remnant of an old sacristy.

Taking now each of the old parish churches in turn it will be of interest to observe their historical development. Thus in West Kirby the foundation is Saxon, but the oldest part existing to-day is late Norman of about the year 1150. In those days the church appears to have consisted of a nave, one aisle, and a chancel. The next re-building was about 1315 when the chancel was extended to its present size. In 1470-1480 the south aisle was added, then in the XVIIIth century all the interior was gutted and the building reduced to the chilling respectability of a Quaker meeting house. From this period of reaction, however, the church seems to have recovered completely for to-day it is over rather than underfilled with ecclesiastical ornament. The oldest parts of the fabric now to be seen are the remains of a Norman column by the churchwarden's pew on the north side, the chancel, and the tower.

At Heswall the church has been so

entirely rebuilt that, save for the tower, an architectural study does not afford so much interest to the ordinary observer, but when we come to Neston we find some extraordinarily interesting survivals. Not that the general fabric has much for the archæological student, for, with the exception of the tower, which is probably late XIVth century, the building was demolished in 1874, and replaced by the present edifice. But at that time there were discovered some remarkable stone carvings which date from Norman or even Saxon times. Two of the fragments which now lie at the west end of the nave appear to have been portions of the shaft of a cross (Plate No. 2). The lower and larger one is skilfully decorated on one side in intertwined double bands, and the other side bears the figure of a priest in a chasuble pointed at the bottom. Both hands are raised above the head. One hand is holding something which may be the bottom of a chalice: the stone is broken here; the other holds what looks like a double cord with something at the ends. One authority suggests that it may be a bucket, and if so it might symbolise baptism, for crosses were

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

ANCIENT STONE CARVINGS
NESTON PARISH CHURCH

sometimes erected at wells where baptisms were held, and buckets are found on other old crosses in Cheshire. Another supposition is that it is a cord with tassels, while Canon Brooke Gwynne considers that the priest is represented as holding in one hand the chalice and in the other the paten, and that the " rope " is really a pair of shears emblematic of the priest being married. The other piece of the cross has a carved figure of a winged angel. In the belfry, built into the wall, is part of the shaft of a second cross bearing a design of two mounted knights fighting with spears. In this church too, are other ancient stones of great archæological value which are placed against the west wall.

Coming next to Burton, of Norman or Saxon foundation, there are to be seen in the porchway several Norman capitals which appear to be relics of the original building, but of the fabric which stands now, the oldest part is the Massey Chapel with its early English window. The masonry here is at least as old as 1380. The church was extensively repaired in 1554, and rebuilt in 1720, as the fabric was then in a very ruinous state. The

following account from an old MS. reveals the condition of the building at that time.

"Some years since the upper part of the Steeple of the Parish Church of Burton was taken down, and the bells taken out the better to preserve the same; yet by reason of its great Antiquity the said Church is now become so ruinous, that it gives way outwards from one end of ye Church to the other; and the Arch between the Church and Chancel is so rent that the walls will not support itt; the Steeple also is crack'd in several Places from top to bottom, and all the four sides of it so shattered that some of the stones are ready to fall out."

It was accordingly rebuilt and now comprises a square embattled tower, nave, chancel, and north aisle, the rebuilding being commemorated by an inscription over the door of the porch, which reads as follows:—

"John Gregory, John Pickance, Thomas Barrow, John Robinson, Trustees, 1721; John Morfitt, Mason; William Cross, Carpenter."

Shotwick Church is of even greater interest. The record of Domesday shows that there was a church here, as at Burton, possessed by the secular canons of St. Werburgh, Chester, at the time of the Norman invasion, and the doorway can be dated from that period or earlier. Ormerod states that the main portion of the church was rebuilt in the xvth century and it appears to have changed

very little since those days. John Owen, "Old Mortality," visited Shotwick about 1850, and described it then in the following words :—

"This church is in a very secluded situation, and is one that has not suffered from modern restoration; but on the other hand it is suffering from neglect, and I suppose it will remain so until it is past repair, when it will be pulled down and everything that gives it an interest will be swept away. What a chance there is here for an active churchwarden to do his duty in attending to timely repairs and arresting the progress of decay which must be surely going on in its present neglected condition.....The present roof covers both nave and aisle, but formerly it appears to have been double; for the nave retains its own roof timbers, which are of the simple hammer-beam [type]; the aisle has the same, the arches dividing them. The wall above the arches is only carried up to the springing of the roof timbers, so that the inner slopes of the principals are entirely free of the roof; uprights or king posts resting on the wall just mentioned in some measure support the roof."

Fortunately Mr. Owen's pessimism has not been borne out by fact, and the fabric is to-day well cared for, the church being restored in 1871. About ten years ago the floor level was lowered and the bases of the columns exposed, the original paving being replaced.

Stoak Church has also been restored, almost too completely. The Tudor roof remains and the old xvth century tower. At Backford the evolution of the fabric affords a more welcome study for the antiquarian. Here, as at West Kirby, a considerable part of the old chancel remains, dating, probably, from 1280, the period of the three-light lancet east window. The windows in the south wall are later and belong to the Perpendicular order. The nave is modern, though much of the old stonework has been used over again in the reconstruction. It is of special interest in that local stone has been used for new work, each column being a monolith.

When we come to Eastham, we find some very complete survivals. Here the foundation is Norman, and to this period the font belongs, together with some of the masonry in the north wall of the

Stanley chapel. Though Eastham is mentioned in Domesday Book it was not, at that time, a distinct parish, nor had it a church; it lay in the parish of Bromborough. In 1152, however, Eastham became distinct and was given, as well as Bromborough, by Earl Randall of Chester, to the Abbot and Convent of St. Werburgh, as a compensation for the ills he had done that house. A few years previously this Earl had built a church at Eastham, dedicated to St. Mary, which is spoken of as a chapel to Bromborough, where stood St. Barnabas', the mother church. Both parishes remained in possession of the monastery until the dissolution, in the reign of Henry VIIIth, when they were conferred upon the Dean and Chapter of the new bishopric, who are still patrons of the livings, though the manors have long passed into other hands. The tower, chancel, and south aisle at Eastham are XIVth century work; the north arcade is Early English, and the south wall Perpendicular. The spire was rebuilt in 1751.

But the most glorious architectural survival in Wirral is at Lower Bebington, and here the development of a church is

better seen than anywhere else, as so much of the original structure still exists. It was remodelled in the XIVth century, but it retained its old plan so that the nave to-day is the old north aisle of the Norman church, and almost the whole of the south wall is Norman work. The greater part of the original fabric is, of course, lost, but there is documentary evidence to prove that there was a church in 1093, and Domesday mentions a priest there under the Manor of Poulton. Tradition says that it was called "the white church," a name given in early days to churches built of Storeton stone. The chancel and part of the south aisle of the present building are late Perpendicular, but exceptionally good work for the period.

Mr. Fergusson Irvine says of this church : "It has been suggested, and with some show of reason, that the Abbot of St. Werburgh, who owned the advowson, becoming alarmed at the dissolution of the smaller houses in 1535, hastened to lay out the surplus funds of the abbey in church extension, lest their existence should tempt the rapacious Henry; and this was one of the churches which he

commenced to rebuild. This blow, however, fell before he was able to complete the work, and so the rebuilding terminated abruptly; and if you will go round to the south exterior wall of the church you can see exactly where the new work ceases; and in the interior it is shown by a curious temporary arch in the arcade, which breaks off at a slight angle from the old Norman work to meet the late pillar, since the church was being widened and raised as the rebuilding proceeded.

Whether the suppression of Chester Abbey was the cause of the cessation in rebuilding or not it is difficult to say, but it is abundantly clear that some one commenced early in the XVIth century to rebuild the church from the east end, and for some cause was not able to finish. It is also clear from the large number of different masons' marks on the new work, that a perfect army of men must have been employed on the rebuilding."

Woodchurch is the last church in Wirral in which the architectural development can easily be traced. Here the lateral growth of the nave southward is very evident, the north wall being the old

Norman work. The name, of course, suggests that the first building was of wood, but of that, naturally, not a trace remains. The lateral extension took place in the XVIth century.

One fact emerges prominently in the study of church evolution, and that is that much of its symbolism has been added and was not in the mind of the original builder. Particularly is this so, for example, in regard to the cruciform plan of many of our English churches. There is, of course, absolute evidence that many churches were erected with intent to symbolise the manner of the death of Christ, for again and again the express instruction is found that such and such a church is to be built " in modum crucis ;" yet the cruciform church is said to be the exception rather than the rule, an observation which is certainly borne out in Wirral, for not a single example occurs amongst our old buildings.

But at Woodchurch there is that curiosity of planning known as a " Weeping Chancel," where there is a deviation of the axis of the eastern limb of the church to the north, a device often thought to be symbolic of the fact that

Our Lord, when dying upon the cross, bowed His head to the right shoulder. Modern archæologists tend to discount this explanation, and affirm that such deviations are simply examples of the builders' failure to secure true alignment during such alterations to a church as the rebuilding of chancel or nave. In some churches the deviation is indeed so slight as, for example, at West Kirby, that this theory is plausible, but in the case of Woodchurch it seems too marked for this to be the case. Francis Bond records that the architect of a church at Metz, built between 1371 and 1409, in which there is a pronounced deviation of axis, "ashamed of having made his work so crooked, died of grief and distress." One may be permitted to express the pious hope that the deviation at Woodchurch was intentional, and that the architect neither merited nor attained so sad an end.

An early Christian church being nearly all nave must have been planned for congregational worship, but, as saintly relics came to be collected, certain churches became known as Pilgrim churches, and in such cases special architectural arrangements had to be made for the reception

of the pilgrims who came to view these sacred deposits. Chapels, therefore, came to be built on to the church for this purpose, though there were gradations in sanctity so that not every saint was deemed worthy of an altar. But of the various chapels thus erected those dedicated to the Blessed Virgin always took pre-eminence, and in the greater churches where the service of the Blessed Virgin grew in splendour, the Lady Chapels came to be of great size and importance. So also in parish churches there came to be added Lady Chapels, a custom surviving to-day in several Wirral churches. It is to be noted in this connection that the side chapel in Heswall is dedicated to St. Peter.

Another annexe to many churches consisted of chantries where masses were said for the dead. Thus the organ chamber at Woodchurch appears to be a converted chantry; when the cell of St. Hildeburgh on Hilbre Island was abandoned, the last monk was drafted to West Kirby as chantry priest; and there is abundant evidence that the church at Lower Bebington was provided with chantries. Intra-mural burial was, of course, com-

mon then, the prevalence of the custom being due to the desire that masses of Requiem should be said for the repose of the soul of the deceased. Ordinarily, in mediæval days, if a poor man died a mass was said for him by the parish priest, but a rich man would leave money for masses to be recited continually, or he might join a guild which would ensure this being done. Thus at Louth there was a guild of St. Mary which found a chaplain to celebrate mass every day in honour of the Blessed Mary, " both for the brethren and sisters of the same guild and for their souls after their departure from this light, and for the souls of their parents and friends and of all the faithful dead," and sometimes private individuals would leave so much money as would provide a perpetual chantry. At the suppression of the monasteries there were some 2,000 such chantries in England.

People, too, starting off early in the morning for a long day's travel liked to hear mass first, so that it was not unusual for a testator to direct that his chantry priest should say what was called " Morrow Mass " at 4.0, 5.0, or 6.0 a.m. These chantry priests were appointed

specially for the purpose of saying mass, the parish priest more rarely officiating, and their salary ranged from about £5 per annum, a sum equivalent to about £75 at the nominal value of the English sovereign to-day.

But the chantry priest had other duties besides those of reciting mass, and in some respects he fulfilled the function of a modern curate, save that he had an independent status, a separate endowment, and a freehold for life, none of which could be interfered with by rector or vicar. Thus the chantry priest was directed to give assistance to the parish priest in hearing confessions, or in bearing the viaticum to the sick; or perhaps the choir was inefficient, and the chantry priest might be directed to act as choirmaster, or he might even be needed as schoolmaster. Thus in 1514 the Earl of Derby founded a chantry in Blackburn church, and directed that the chantry "shall keep continually a free grammar school, and every Saturday and holiday he shall sing the Mass of Our Lady to note, and every quarter day he and his scholars shall sing a solemn dirge for the souls aforesaid." And in the vast moorland

parishes of North Yorkshire, such as Halifax and Helmsley, where the inhabitants of the remote hamlets were provided with chapels of their own, the chantry priests were sometimes directed to take the services. So that, when all chantry endowments were at last confiscated, it was not an unmixed blessing : the parson lost his curate, services had to be greatly curtailed in number and dignity, choristers lost their choirmaster and the grammar-school boys their master, the hamlets lost their chaplains; and nobody was apparently the better for it except Edward VIth. It was in 1529 that Parliament made it illegal to charge for Mass or the Requiem, and in 1545 that the incomes of chantries were confiscated; and after the death of Queen Mary the chantry chapel passed away for ever from the English church.

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CHAPTER II.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF WIRRAL OLD CHURCHES.

" The architect
Built his great heart into these sculptured stones,
And with him toiled his children, and their lives
Were builded, with his own, into these walls
As offerings unto God."

Longfellow.

ANYONE who visits a great cathedral church is aware that the building in which he stands is assigned to different periods in history, and that archæologists, and others versed in matters ecclesiastical, can determine the period to which any part of the building belongs by an examination of its architectural style. The nave, for example, may be Norman; the chan-

cel, Perpendicular; the Lady Chapel, Modern, and so on. As a rule, in such churches, a guide is to be found who has some knowledge of these things, or who at least has memorized certain facts, and he will often " fire off " a perfect fusillade of verbiage to which a crowd of sightseers pay a reverent, if unintelligent, attention.

And it is because the present writer has so often himself been one of this common multitude that he ventures to give such information concerning the architectural modes exhibited in the old churches of Wirral as will enable those who visit them to examine and recognise some of the essential features of those styles for themselves. As an aid to this study there are standard classifications of architecture which will form a basis upon which to work, though modern architects tend to deprecate these classifications as being inelastic and too definite; for a tabulated list of styles may be presumed to presuppose a definite demarcation which, in point of fact, does not exist. One style gradually evolved into its successor, and successive architects naturally embodied in their work the experience of those who had preceded them. Nevertheless such

classifications have their value so long as they are received with caution, and treated as guides rather than laws. The following is an example :—

RICKMAN'S CLASSIFICATION.

NORMAN : William I to Stephen, 1066-1154.
TRANSITION NORMAN : Henry II, 1154-1189.
EARLY ENGLISH GOTHIC : Richard I, to Henry III, 1189-1272.
DECORATED : Edward I, II, III, 1272-1377.
PERPENDICULAR : Richard II to Henry VII, 1377-1485.
TUDOR : Henry VIII to Elizabeth, 1485-1600.

Applying now such a system to the old churches of Wirral, we must begin with the Norman style, for though several of the churches boast a Saxon foundation it is doubtful if any authenticated Saxon work is now to be seen above ground. But of Norman work there are a number of interesting examples, notably the Norman chapel at Birkenhead Priory, the fine old south doorway of Shotwick parish church, the ancient low-side window in the north side of the chancel in Woodchurch, the Norman columns of Lower Bebington Church, and the Norman fonts at Lower Bebington, Eastham, and St. Luke's, Poulton,*and these examples,

* This Font was originally in St. Hilary's Church, Wallasey.

with others, when examined in detail, will reveal many of the special characteristics by which Norman architecture is recognised.

The arch is perhaps the most distinctive feature of this style. It is semi-circular and, in the case of Shotwick, decorated with a form of ornament of which the Norman builders were very fond, viz., the "Chevron" or zig-zag. This decoration is also seen round the Norman fonts at Lower Bebington and St. Luke's, Poulton. The latter also exhibits another very favourite Norman decoration, the "cable," so called because it resembles a twisted rope. The typical arch is seen again in the deeply splayed window in Woodchurch. These windows were little better than slits, and were covered, some have supposed, with oiled linen. Others affirm that the Normans used glass and even stained glass at times, and in the wonderful copy of Norman work in Lord Leverhulme's church at Thornton Hough, the windows contain glass which is said by many experts to be an accurate replica of Norman glazing.

The circular Norman column and cushioned capital with chamfered abacus,

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

NORMAN COLUMNS, CAPITALS, AND ARCH
BEBINGTON
(Note Perpendicular window to left of column)

as seen in Lower Bebington church, are also distinctive of the period. In larger or more ornate buildings the Normans decorated their columns with great zig-zag incisions, and these are exemplified in the Thornton Hough copy, but there are no examples in Wirral of the clustered column, such as is seen in the wonderful Norman work in such cathedrals as Norwich or Ely. Norman cushioned capitals are also seen in the porchway of Burton church. They were dug up in the graveyard and afford a convincing proof of the great antiquity of the foundations.

But Norman workmanship has other distinctive features besides the round arch, the typical ornaments and the circular columns. The Normans conceived buildings on a large scale. Their walls are great solid constructions of immense thickness, so that their arches are deeply recessed. Their columns appear to possess a strength of circumference almost out of proportion to what they have to carry. The Normans, too, seemed afraid to pierce their walls with many or large windows, as is well seen in the old north wall of the nave at Wood-

church, which is early Norman, and in the south wall of the nave in Lower Bebington church. Both these walls have been pierced by later workmen, but the size of the original windows can be gauged from the small low-side window in the chancel at Woodchurch. Nevertheless all this strength is sometimes more apparent than real, for these massive pillars and walls were often filled with rubbish, and the inferior mortar which the Normans used occasioned the fall of many of their buildings.

A very complete study of the Norman style can fortunately be obtained from the exquisite reproductions of this architectural mode in Thornton Hough Congregational Church, already referred to. Another very excellent copy can be seen in the parish church at Hoylake, and a third, an example of Norman arcading, at the west end of the nave in Neston church. It is said that the old architects did not copy, and that to their fidelity to their own period and style we owe our ability to date the various portions of buildings which have survived. One cannot help wondering, therefore, if our modern copies of historical types may not

From an original Pen-drawing by the Author

OLD NORMAN WINDOW
WITH FRAGMENT OF WHEEL CROSS
WOODCHURCH

prove a source of bewilderment to ecclesiologists of future generations.

Gothic architecture, being later than Norman, is met with much more frequently in Wirral, though of early Gothic there is very little. The term "Gothic," of course, is used rather loosely to cover the whole mediæval age, but architecturally the Gothic period covers those styles in which the pointed arch predominates. This form of arch made particular headway in England. Its origin is obscure. One theory is that it was the result of the intersection of two round arches, such as are so commonly met with in the late Norman work, and formed the model for the arcading on the parish church at Hoylake; while a more poetic imagination has seen the original conception of Gothic architecture in an avenue of trees. The pointed arch was known, however, to the East long before it appeared in this country, having been found in cisterns and tombs in Egypt and Arabia, dating from centuries before the Christian Era.

A second characteristic feature of Gothic work was in the arrangement of mass. The Normans, as has been seen,

were fond of great strength and big stones. The Gothic masons employed small stones, and aimed at delicate traceried effects with rich ornamentation, which developed ultimately into marvellous stone filigree work. But it took several centuries before these refinements were possible, and in the simple and insignificant lancet windows in the south aisle of Lower Bebington church we see the dawn of a new movement.

In these windows there are two lights under each dripstone, and the head of the window is pierced with a single opening. This shows the beginning of that window tracery which became so ornate in later Gothic. It is, however, in the narrow pointed arch and in the length of window that we recognise the Early English style. The deeply splayed window in the spire at Eastham, reminding us of the Norman low-side window in Woodchurch, exhibits the transition from Norman to Gothic which Early English architecture so often reveals. Early English windows are also seen in the Massey chapel at Burton, and in the chancel of Backford church.

Probably the most beautiful feature of an early Gothic church is the spire which,

soaring above town or hamlet, affords a prominent landmark: "Star-high and pointing still to something higher."

This feature is seen at Eastham and Lower Bebington churches, which possess the only old spires in Wirral. Architects say that spires are not difficult to build, as scaffolding can be placed both inside and outside, and the stones are laid in horizontal beds as in a wall; nevertheless as one looks up to the capstone of one of these steeples he cannot help feeling impressed by the venturesomeness of those old builders. No wonder that when a spire was finished there was great rejoicing. "This year (1515)," writes an old chronicler, "the weathercock was set upon the broach, there being there present the parish priest, with many of his brother priests, hallowing the said weather-cock and the stone that it stands on, and so conveyed unto the said broach. And then the priests sang TE DEUM LAUDAMUS with organs. And then the churchwardens gart ring all the bells and caused all the people there being to have bread and ale. And all for the love of God, Our Lady, and All Saints."

Doubtless the parishioners of Bebing-

ton and Eastham held a similar fête when their spires were completed. Both are of broach type. "These," says Francis Bond, "are indigenous and peculiar to England; they are in fact nothing but a stone version of that type of timber spire which is to be seen at Bosham. It has been held, indeed, that the timber broach spire is copied from the stone one; but it is inconceivable that a stone mason could have evolved out of his own brain such a strange design as that of the broach spire; whereas the design of the timber broach grew naturally out of structural exigencies. The characteristics of the stone broach spire are that it has dripping eaves, and therefore no parapet; that the squinches or concentric arches inside the tower at its angles, which support the oblique sides of the spire, are covered with a broach or sloping pyramid of masonry resting against the oblique sides, so that normally it has no angle pinnacles; and that it has no dormer windows at its base, but, instead, has two or more tiers of spire lights. The object of the spire lights is mainly decorative, but they are of value in lighting the interior of the spire and in ventilating it,

for stone as well as wood is better for ventilation."

It will be noticed that the sides of a church spire are often slightly curved so as to swell out a little in the middle. This is called "entasis," and is a device to correct the appearance of a concavity which would be produced by an absolutely straight line. This architectural refinement was familiar to the Greeks who, for example, arched the horizontal lines of the Parthenon in Athens, and also gave an entasis to the columns. Sometimes the same effect is produced by adding small projecting gables, bands of carving, or crockets, and these ornaments are often seen upon spires.

The spire, though peculiar to Christian architecture, is not now credited with any symbolic origin, and it has neither secular nor pagan tradition behind it. It was unknown to the Greeks and Romans, nor is it ever met with apart from religious buildings. "It has," says Sydney Heath, "a climatic rather than a symbolic origin. The pitch of the tower roof was gradually steepened so that it could better carry off the snow and rain so prevalent in northern lands. The small and steeply-

pitched tower roof was a utilitarian feature only until the devotional art of the XIVth and XVth centuries caught the idea, and developed it magnificently into the beautiful and elongated spire that has become so distinctive and suggestive a feature of our Christian churches."

The period which followed the Lancet or Early English type of Gothic was the Decorated, which, in Sharpe's classification, is subdivided into "geometrical" and "curvilinear," these terms being derived from the form of the window tracery. The geometric style was arrived at by the study of figures arising from circles, while the curvilinear is distinguished by traceries, formed by flowing lines. Of this variety of architecture Wirral possesses but little that is genuine, though, in the beautiful church at Thurstaston, we have a very perfect model of the Decorated style, and it is really there that it is best studied. Original windows may be seen at Eastham, where the east window of the chancel and the west window of the tower belong to the geometric order. The east window at Thurstaston is curvilinear, while the east window of the chancel at Lower Bebing-

ton exhibits the transition from the Decorated to the Perpendicular style. At Thurstaston, too, the Gothic system of stone roofing is exquisitely copied. In both churches the buttresses are typical. They consist, as a rule, of two stages, each division being sloped at the top to carry off rain, and they are set in pairs at the angles of the churches, at right angles to each other. Later buttresses were set singly and diagonally as in the Perpendicular porch at Woodchurch.

The Perpendicular order or, as it is also called, "Rectilinear" or "Tudor-Gothic," is the last division of Gothic architecture and is considered, chiefly on account of the flattening of the arch, to mark its decadence. The gradual widening of the arch is, of course, observed from the Lancet period downwards. Of this Perpendicular order there are several fine examples in Wirral, and it is one that is simple to identify. The flattened or "four-centered" arch is its chief characteristic, and is seen very typically in the chancel of Lower Bebington church, in the windows of both aisles in Eastham church, in the south porchway of Woodchurch, and in most of the tower doorways

in Wirral, where the arch is enclosed in a square head formed by the outer mouldings with a hood mould of the same shape, the spandrels being filled with Tudor ornament. The typical Perpendicular buttresses of the porch at Woodchurch have already been referred to. Such buttresses were often terminated with a small crocketed pinnacle, and this feature is well demonstrated in the fine church at Port Sunlight, so that, just as the Norman style may be studied at Thornton Hough, and the Decorated Gothic at Thurstaston, so the Perpendicular order may be seen in its perfection at Christ Church, in Lord Leverhulme's model village.

But almost more typical than buttress or arch in the Perpendicular order is the window, which is instantly recognised by its vertical mullions, carried right up to the window head and, in the case of absolute Perpendicular work, by the use of a horizontal transom, while the window tracery instead of being filled with curved bars of stone is subdivided by rigid vertical forms which suggested the term "Rectilinear," as given in Mr. Sharpe's classification.

Photograph by the Author

PERPENDICULAR DOORWAY
WEST KIRBY CHURCH TOWER

The square tower at the western end of many Wirral churches is another Perpendicular feature, and is met with in West Kirby, Neston, Stoak, Woodchurch, Backford, Bidston, Heswall, and Shotwick. Each of these towers has a castellated parapet, which is a distinctive ornament, while several of these towers, notably that at West Kirby, are further decorated above the uppermost string course with the typical Perpendicular arcading, seen also very perfectly round the chancel walls of Lower Bebington church.

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CHAPTER III.

THE BELLS OF WIRRAL.

Behold my uses are not small,
That God to praise Assemblys call;
That break the thunders, wayle the dead,
And cleanse the aire of Tempests bred;
With feare keep off the Fiends of Hell,
And all by vertue of my knell.

From the "Golden Legend."

BELL-hunting has been described as an interesting form of sport, and a pursuit not without its dangers. This statement will probably come as a surprise to the average reader who has, very likely, never considered a church from this point of view. But listen to a description of the difficulties of belfry climbing by an enthusiast: "The rungs of the ladder worn out, the very baulks rotten, the steps of the newel staircase so abraded by the tread of

centuries as to be almost non-existent, perilous in the extreme to life and limb; the belfry resembling nothing but a guano-island on the coast of Peru; frequently containing cart loads of sticks, straws, and other rubbish brought in by birds for their nests. The air-fauna comprises jackdaws, starlings, sparrows; sometimes a pair of barn owls, occasionally domestic pigeons. The invertebrates will demonstrate their presence the ensuing night by keeping the explorer awake; while everything—bells, stocks, frame, floor—will be white with the deposit of guano."

Another ardent bell hunter writes of even greater adventures: "In many a tower," says he, "there is no stone staircase, and the bells have to be reached by a succession of crazy ladders, planted, it may be, on equally crazy floors. Or again there is no ladder at all, and one has to be brought from a long distance and reared with difficulty, perhaps through a narrow doorway or among beams which hinder it from reaching the trapdoor. When there is no tower, but only a turret, the difficulties are greatly increased, especially if the only means of access are ladders

placed outside." And a third speaks of having negotiated "a vertical ladder of appalling height."

But fortunately there is much that is interesting about church bells that can be appreciated without emulating either the Alpine climber or the steeple-jack, and the aim of the present chapter is to present some of these details to the general reader so that he may be spared the unhealthy excitement of steeple climbing, and the mortification of finding that he has ruined a suit of clothes. For, after all, bells, unlike children, are intended to be heard rather than seen, and, though bell founders are at some pains to decorate their bells, this would appear to be dictated more by traditional usage than by the desire to please archæologists, for the old bells were probably all cast under monastic supervision and these, being often dedicated to saints, were inscribed with some intercessory prayer. After the Reformation such custom was forbidden, but the practice of adorning bells with some pious phrase continued, and is still in vogue.

Many of the these inscriptions are of great interest. At West Kirby there is

Photograph by the Author

STOAK CHURCH

a peal of eight bells, one of which was presented by Mr. John Glegg, and on that there was inscribed his name, with the comment "A good Benefactor." That was in 1719; but in 1850, as the bell was cracked, it was recast and it now bears the more mundane inscription of the founders, "Bathgate and Wilson, 1854." Heswall bells were also recast, the originals dating from 1627. Original bells are found at Backford, where there are five which date from 1714, one bearing the inscription,

"Let none be in anger.
We were cast by Richard Saunders."

Stoak, however, has the distinction of possessing the oldest bells in Wirral. There are three there bearing the following words and dates:—

"God save His Church, our King and Realme, 1631."

"God save His Church, 1642."

"Gloria in Excelsus, H.B., 1615."

In the latter case the founder's Latin seems at fault. The letters H.B. are considered to designate Sir Henry Bunbury, one of the distinguished family so long associated with the parish. Quaint inscriptions are found on some of the bells in other parishes of Wirral.

At Eastham are the following :—

1. "When we ring we sweetly sing."
2. "I to the church the living call,
   And to the grave I summon all."

Burton amongst its peal of six bells has :—

1. "Ring out black sin,
   Fair peace ring in."
2. "Peace and good neighbourhood."
3. "Prosperity to the Church of England."
4. "Prosperity to this Parish."

At Shotwick there is a peal of three bells, on one of which is expressed the pious wish :

"Jesus be our speed."

Bromborough, however, leads the way in elaborate bell inscriptions, the peal of eight (all modern) being adorned by the following verses composed by the rector, the Rev. E. Dyer Green.

1. "When the full ring its tuneful voice shall raise,
   Let me be first to lead the call of praise."
2. "Gladsome we peal from out the Church's tower,
   To God's great glory, and His love and power."
3. "To worship duly Heaven's Almighty Lord
   Our sweetest choirs unite with one accord."

4. "When wedded love makes two as one abide
Their joy we share, and spread it far and wide."
5. "From Mersey's banks sounds forth our sacred glee,
And courts responsive echoes from the Dee."
6. "Aloft are we, but loftier points the spire,
That, heavenward, man should raise his heart's desire."
7. "May every strain melodious we outpour
Stir all who hear, God's goodness to adore."
8. "Gloria in Excelsis."

Number eight is a very common bell inscription.

The bells at Woodchurch and Lower Bebington are all modern, but those at Bidston have an interesting history, for five of the peal of six were recast in 1868 from three older bells, one of which was said to have borne the inscription,

"Sancti Oswaldi."

And it is on the strength of this tradition that the church bears its present dedication. Phillip Sully, in his "Hundred of Wirral," says that this bell was brought from Hilbre in 1536, and that it originally came from the parish church of St. Oswald, in Chester.

The bells of Neston are also distinguished for a curious history or tradition, for the story goes that the old bells were intended for a church in Wales, but the Welsh churchwardens could not pay for them and they were ferried over to Neston. In an old inventory of the church at Neston, in the second year of Edward VI, which is preserved in the Mayer museum, at Lower Bebington, there is an entry "Itm iii bells in the steeple," and in the inventory of the next year this is altered to "a ringe of ii bells." Probably one of the three had been melted down to make cannon in the time of Henry VIII, for this was a common fate for bells. In 1724 the Neston people decided to get a set of six bells from Abraham Rudhall, of Gloucester, who was providing Burton with a peal, and four of these bells are still in use. They bear the following inscriptions :—

1. "Peace and good neighbourhood.
A. R., 1731."
2. "Prosperity to this Parish.
A. R., 1731."
3. "Prosperity to the Church of England.
A. R., 1731."

"A. Rudhall of Gloucester cast us all, 1731."

The custom of engraving a name upon a bell is said to have originated with Pope John XIII, who consecrated a bell and gave it the name "John." The baptism of bells was certainly in use from very early times, and it appears that the sponsors of bells were often people of quality, while the officiating priest was of high ecclesiastical rank. Thus at St. Lawrence, Reading, in 1499, the church wardens record that they paid 6/8 for the hallowing of the great bell named "Harry," Sir William Symys and Mistress Smythe being godfather and godmother.

The ritual of consecration was elaborate. The service began with a Litany and a series of antiphonal psalms. Then the bell that was to be blessed was washed with holy water containing salt, wiped with a towel and anointed with holy oil, seven times on the outside and four times on the inside. The bell was then incensed and hung. After such an imposing ceremony a very considerable amount of sanctity naturally attached itself to a church bell, and the idea soon arose that the bell had certain miraculous powers. One of these was the ability to quell

storms, a belief referred to in the "Golden Legend." Bells were also supposed to drive away evil spirits, both of disease and moral offences. It is therefore no matter of surprise that we have records of bells being rung in times of storm and tempest, but the frequency with which churches have been struck by lightning or blown down by gales would appear to discredit this superstition. Thus Heswall church, Stanlaw Abbey, and Wallasey church tower were all destroyed by lightning, storm, or fire, though in the first case, the actual tower escaped.

Protection of the spire and the bells from lightning is now secured by means of a conducting rod, usually of copper, but the mediæval builder employed a different method. In 1315 a new cross, well gilt, was set on the top of the spire of Old St. Paul's, London, with great and solemn procession, by Gilbert de Segrave, Bishop of London, and relics of saints were placed in it, "in order that the omnipotent God and the glorious merits of His saints, whose relics are contained within the pommel of the cross, might deign to protect it from danger of storms." At Salisbury, while making

some repairs in 1762, the workmen found a cavity on the south side of the capstone of the spire, in which cavity was a leaden box, enclosing a second box of wood, which contained a piece of much decayed silk or fine linen, no doubt a relic placed there to avert lightning and tempest.

Many bells have, of course, been lost, and, because bell-metal can be melted down and re-used, it happened that large numbers of bells were confiscated at the period of the dissolution of the monasteries. Indeed, after the church plate and the lead on the roof, bells were regarded as the most valuable asset. The metal, as we have seen, was used particularly in the manufacture of cannon, until it was brought home to the authorities that bell-metal was being exported for this purpose. Steps were therefore taken, in the reign of Henry VIII and Elizabeth, to check the destruction of bells, by a proclamation stating that "some patrons of churches had prevailed with a parson and parishioners to take or throw down the bells of churches or chapels and to convert the same to their private gain," and forbidding the practice under pain of imprisonment.

Bell-metal is an alloy of copper and tin, and it is said that in olden days people were so proud of their church bells that they not only contributed money for their casting, but also metal household utensils. Stories of silver tankards and the like being put in to give a "silvery tone," are, however, discredited, it being stated that silver would mar the tone, not improve it.

A good tone is, in fact, very difficult to secure, and the tuning of the bells affords many opportunities for the exercise of skill. The modern method of tuning is first to cast the bell more thickly than required, so as to keep the note sharp, and then plane off shavings from the interior by means of steam power until the right pitch is obtained. If a bell tone is too flat, it can be raised by paring off the edge of the rim, but, as this impairs the tone, it is considered better to recast the bell. In olden days bells were tuned with a hammer, chisel, and file, and there were men who went about the country tuning bells, sometimes passing weeks in a belfry chipping and modulating every bell till all were right. For, if the ring is to be quite satisfactory, each bell must not only

be in tune with the other bells of the peal, but the various tones of the individual bell must be in tune with one another, for the bell tone is really a chord, i.e., a harmony of several notes, and to get this tone perfect is the highest triumph of the art. Dr. Raven mentions that Bilbie of Cullompton, Devon, a famous founder in the early part of the nineteenth century, committed suicide because he failed to get a ring of bells in tune.

When a bell had been cast and tuned and, in ancient times, baptized, it had to be hung. For this purpose the early churches seen to have favoured central towers, but it is probable that a long period elapsed before parish churches became possessed of bell towers. Few are earlier than the XIVth century, and the majority are much later. In Wirral, the steeples of Eastham and Lower Bebington churches are the oldest, and after them come the common western towers of the XIVth and XVth centuries or Perpendicular period, viz., Stoak, Backford, Heswall, West Kirby, Shotwick, Wallasey (the old tower), and Bidston; Burton church tower and the old one at Thurstaston are later.

Within these towers the bells are suspended in a timber framework, which was kept as far as possible clear of the walls, the idea being that the oscillation of the bells when they are swung, as well as the sound waves, might shake and disintegrate the tower masonry. The vibration is indeed strongly felt with a large peal and may be too great for the strength of the building as, for example, in Chester Cathedral, where the tower cannot stand the full peal. In this case the bells were raised a considerable number of feet above their original level, and it is very likely that the centre of gravity of the tower has been thus disturbed and the damage, which is now being investigated and repaired, occasioned thereby. Modern bells are suspended in iron frames built firmly into the walls.

The art of campanology has in the process of years reached a very high state of perfection, and the ringing of a peal involves a degree of knowledge and skill that would surprise the majority of people. With a small number of bells there are, of course, very few changes possible, four bells only yielding twenty-four possible combinations, but six bells give 720, and

eight bells 40,320, and with twelve bells the possible variety of changes is stupendous. An old bell-ringer informed the present writer that with twelve bells it is possible to ring 24 changes to the minute, and that at this rate it would take 38 years to exhaust all the possible changes, but H. B. Walters, in his "Church Bells of England," says that at the rate of two strokes a second it would take 91 years before all the possible combinations were exhausted. Neither of these programmes can be put to a practical test, but Ellacombe, in his "Bells of the Church," gives particulars of some surprising feats in change-ringing. Thus in 1868 eight members of the Ancient Society of College Youths occupied the belfry of St. Matthew's Church, Bethnal Green, and in nine hours and twelve minutes rang a peal of Kent treble bob major consisting of 15,840 changes. The men were locked in the belfry, and did not cease ringing from 8.45 a.m. until the peal was finished. This record was, however, surpassed in 1872, when at Earlsheaton, near Dewsbury, in Yorkshire, a true peal of Kent treble bob major, consisting of no less than 16,608 changes, was rung in nine

hours fifty minutes. In the ringing chamber of West Kirby Parish church there are framed several interesting records of bell-ringing by the local band.

The uses and varieties of bells were once greater than they are now. Thus in mediæval times a small bell was used at the solemn service of the Mass, when three strokes were sounded as the choir sang the first three words of "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth," and the bell was accordingly called the "Sancte" or "Saunce" bell. It was rung not only to warn the illiterate congregation there present to make a solemn acknowledgment of the doctrine of the Trinity, but also that those who could not come to church might bow the head.

A little later in the service came the Elevation of the Host, when again a bell was rung. This was called the "Sacring" or the "Sackering" bell. Two such bells figure in the inventory of the monastery of Stanlaw at the time of the Dissolution. The use of such bells was forbidden in the reign of Edward VI, who issued the following injunction, "all ringing and knolling of bells shall be

utterly forborne at that time (Litany, Mass, etc.) except one bell in convenient time to be rung or knolled before the sermon." Sermon bells carried on for a considerable period after this, and indeed would appear still to survive in certain parishes, though not in Wirral. The practice of ringing the sermon bell, however, came to have a very degenerate significance. Thus at Louth it was called the "Leaving-off" bell, because it warned the servants that the mistress was leaving church, and that it was not safe after that to stand gossiping in the streets. At Watford a bell used to be rung after morning service "to give notice to gentlemen's servants to get their master's carriages ready." In some places it was called the "Pudding" bell, because the cooks took advantage of it to dish up the Sunday dinner in readiness for the return of the family from morning service. At Tingrith, Bedfordshire, it is still rung immediately after morning service, and it is called the "Potato" bell, because on hearing it the cook puts the potatoes in the pot for boiling.

"In many parishes," says Mr. Walters, "a 'Gleaning' bell used to be rung

during Harvest, either in the morning only, or both morning and evening. The usual hours were 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.; but it was sometimes rung at 6 or 7 a.m., or at 5 or 7 p.m. Its object was to serve as a signal for the time when gleaning might begin, and when it must terminate; this was to give all—weak and old or young and active—a fair start and an equal chance. Under modern agricultural conditions gleaning has in many parts of England become a thing of the past, and it is now only in the corn-growing districts of the south and east of England that a 'Gleaning' bell is ever heard."

In feudal days tenants had both to grind their corn in the manorial mill and to bake their bread in the manorial oven. In some parishes an "Oven" bell used to be rung, to give warning that the manorial oven was heated and ready for use.

In Neston Church registers there is each year an item of 8/-, with an allowance of 5d. for 1-lb. of candles, "for ringing the 8 o'clock bell." This Curfew Bell is still rung at Neston from October to March each year, but with this exception, the church bells of Wirral are only regularly tolled for services and funerals.

In connection with the latter custom there is an extraordinarily interesting history. The practice began in mediæval days, when a person who fell grievously sick was attended by the priest, who, with book and candle, proceeded to the sick bed lest the patient should die, "unhousell'd, disappointed, unanel'd," and the "Houseling" bell, which is sometimes mentioned in the inventories taken at the time of the Dissolution, was a hand-bell carried in the procession and rung when the Eucharist was borne to the sick person, that everyone might be warned of its approach and pay proper reverence thereto or offer prayers for the sick or dying person.

Then came the custom of the tolling of the church bells as the sick man actually lay dying. This was called the "Passing" bell or the "Soul" bell. It was rung at all hours of the day or night when the critical time of death arrived, and its purpose was to encourage the pious to pray for the soul that was passing on its way. Shakespeare, for example, notes this bell in the first act of Henry IV :

"His tongue
Sounds ever after as a sullen knell,
Remembered knolling a departed friend."

But a difficulty arose when an apparently dying person recovered, and doubtless, too, the psychological effect of a sick man hearing his own passing bell and dying of pessimism had its influence in abolishing the practice.

When death did come, the death knell was rung, and it is curious that this bell, which originally had as its object the encouragement of prayers for the dead, should have been the one that has survived in the Post-Reformation church. The procedure of ringing the death knell varies in different parishes, but most commonly 3 x 3 strokes are given at the death of a man, 3 x 2 for a woman, and 3 x 1 for a child. It is said that the three strokes for a man have reference to the Holy Trinity, and the two for a woman to Our Saviour born of a woman. Originally rung at the exact moment of death, the death knell has now lost something of its significance by being rung at a later hour. In early days the funeral peals might go on for thirty days, a period symbolic of the mourning for Moses and Aaron, which is stated to have lasted that time. The Rev. J. J. Raven refers to one John Baret who made provision in his will to have a 30 days'

peal rung for him, and he adds, "The neighbours must have been heartily sorry for John Baret's death before his Trental was over, especially as the tune was limited to five notes."

Just as bell hunting has attracted certain archæologists to-day, so in the olden days bell-ringing was once an extraordinarily popular pastime which vied with hunting and cock-fighting in favour, so that ringing societies were formed in almost every town and village, bands touring the country ringing bells in one another's belfries, and performing wonderful feats of precision and endurance. Some of this enthusiasm has evaporated, but much survives, enough at least to say that England may still deserve the title of the "Land of Bells."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD CHURCHYARDS OF WIRRAL.

" What an image of peace and rest
Is this little church among its graves,
All is so quiet."

Longfellow.

THE Lychgate—the gate of the dead, or, as it is also called, the " corpse gate "—is seen at the entrance to several of the old churchyards in Wirral, namely, West Kirby, Thurstaston, Backford, Eastham, and Woodchurch, and in these the standard form of such gateway is observed, that is, a broad outspreading gable roof designed to shelter those who accompany the bier as the priest performs the introductory part of the burial service. In days gone by a curious superstition attached itself to these gates, which was that the spirit of the last person interred

in the churchyard hovered round them and conveyed the new arrivals to the grave. This belief, which still survives in places, has actually occasioned free fighting in the case of double burials, each party claiming the privilege of burying its dead first, and so obtaining the porterage of the ghost. It was also regarded as a bad omen for a bridal couple to pass through the lychgates, a superstition which lingered in Cheshire until recent days, if, indeed, it does not still obtain in this county.

Another superstition, which still holds sway, is the aversion to being buried on the north side of the church. The origin of this repugnance is said to have been the notion that the northern part was appropriated to the interment of unbaptized infants, excommunicated persons, and suicides. Hence it became generally regarded as the "wrong side of the church." White, in his "Natural History of Selborne," alludes to this superstition, and says that the disinclination to be buried on the north side had led to the overcrowding of the south with graves. Francis Bond also states, in his "English Church Architecture," that on this account the extension of churches

was generally to the north rather than the south so as not to disturb the burial ground, but it is to be noted that in Wirral, extensions have been southward in several cases, as is shown by the north wall of such churches being the oldest. This is so, for example, in Shotwick and Woodchurch, though not in the case of Lower Bebington, so that it is, evidently, not safe to generalise.

In the registers of the parish church of Burton there occur the following entries :—

" 1678 Joseph son to Raffe Lightfoot of burton was buryed in Woolen the 16th day of Nov. 1678.

1678 Thos. Perry of Willaston was buryed in wool the 25th day of Dec. 1678.

1679 Thos. son to Jonathan Willson of burton was buryed without any linen the first day of May."

These extraordinary entries are relics of a sumptuary law passed in 1666, ostensibly for the encouragement of woollen manufacturers and prevention of the exportation of gold for the buying and importation of linen. In 1667 the Act directed that no person should " be buried in any shirt or sheet other than should be made of Wooll onely." It even prohibited the use of linen bandages in the laying out of the dead.

In 1668 the Act was made still more stringent, stating "Noe Corpse of any person or persons shall be buried in any Shirt, Shift, Sheete, or Shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hempe, Silke, Haire, Gold or Silver, or any stuffe or thing other than what is made of Sheep's Wooll onely, or be put in any coffin lined or faced with any sort of Cloath or Stuffe or anything whatsoever that is made of any Materiall but Sheep's Wooll onely, upon paine of the forfeiture of five pounds of lawfull money of England," etc.

Another section enacted that the clergy were to keep a register of burials, and in it to record affidavits that had previously been made before a Justice of the Peace for the county, or other persons authorised by the Act. When the Act was broken, half the penalty went to the poor of the parish and the other half to the informer. Usually, by arrangement, a servant of the household, or someone whom the family desired to receive the benefit, laid information. The Act provided, however, that persons dying of plague might be buried without a penalty being incurred, even if linen were used. In section nine it was

directed that "this Act shall publiquely be read upon the first Sunday after the feast of St. Bartholomew every yeare for seaven yeares next following, presently after Divine Service."

Affidavits had to be signed by the minister who conducted the burial and by a local Justice of the Peace. The certificate read as follows:—

I.....do hereby certify that.....came before me this present day of.....and made Oath that..... deceased was not put in, wrapt or wound up, or buried in any Shift, Shirt, Sheete or Shroud made or mingled with Flax, Hempe, Silke, Haire, Gold or Silver or other than is made of Sheep's wool only or in any coffin lined or faced with any Cloth, Stuff, or any other thing whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hempe, Silke, Haire, Gold or Silver, or any other material but Sheep's Wool only. signed and sealed, etc."

The Act was repealed in 1814, though it had fallen into disuse long before that period.

A more cheerful association of churchyards is that of sport. In bygone years it was a common practice for all sorts of games to be regularly played in churchyards, for just as the church was used for many secular purposes, such as the storage of wool and corn, so the churchyards came to be regarded from a secular as well as an ecclesiastical point of view. Even dances and fairs were held as

late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, the north side of the churchyards where there were no graves being selected for the former of the two pastimes. Cock-fighting, single stick, and wrestling matches also took place regularly in the churchyard after Evensong. A correspondent to "Notes and Queries" writes that he remembers being told by an old man that, as a boy, he played at ball in the churchyard, and that the practice was strongly disapproved of by the vicar who, however, was not able to suppress it. But the vicar gave orders that when he died he should be buried in the place where the boys played, and that an altar tombstone should be placed on his grave, saying that, though he had failed to stop the ball playing in his lifetime, he would stop it after his death: and he did so! Nowadays we find it hard to realise that the churchyards of Wirral could have been so regularly recognised as public playgrounds.

Associated with churchyard games was the very important festival known as the "Church-Ale" which, originally instituted in honour of the church Saint, was later often kept up for the purpose of raising funds for the church building. So

the churchwardens used to have brewed regularly a considerable quantity of strong ale, a custom which is said "led to a great pecuniary advantage, for the rich thought it a meritorious duty, besides paying for the ale, to offer largely to the church fund."

This method of raising money is referred to in the following stanza from Francis Beaumont's "Exaltation of Ale,"

"The churches much owe, as we all do know,
For when they be drooping and ready to fail,
By a Whitsun or Church-Ale up again they shall go,
And owe their repairing to a pot of good ale."

But the practice, as might be imagined, was the cause of much abuse, so that by the canons of 1683 it was enacted that "The Churchwardens shall suffer no plays, feasts, banquets, suppers, Church-ale drinking . . . in the Church, Chapel, or Churchyard."

A common feature of the old churchyard is the sun-dial, and of these Wirral possesses not a few. The majority of the old ones date from the XVIIIth century.

That at Shotwick is dated 1767 upon the dial plate, but 1720 is inscribed upon the shaft, the church register recording that the cost of " carving ye letters " was only one shilling. A somewhat similar entry occurs in the West Kirby churchwarden's accounts recording the cost of changing the position of the sun-dial and resetting the plate, and again the items are in pence. Recently the sun-dial was moved a second time, and one wonders what the bill was in these post-war labour-troublous days. Backford, Stoak, Eastham, Heswall, Burton, Bidston, and Neston all possess old sun-dials, reminding us of the way mankind has played with time. Lovers of these relics deprecate too antiquarian an interest in such poetic fragments of the past.

" If a husky-voiced antiquarian," says Launcelot Cross in his " Book of Old Sundials," " were to discourse upon a sundial to some of the elect of his fraternity, although it were in a green country churchyard with the severe stillness of nature around, the aroma of the motto would instantly depart. The exhortative words would remain, but—harsh to the eye, cold to the ear—the spirit that gave

them life would be flown. The parting genius would be with sighing sent. In the bare, chilly room of a museum a sundial lecture would be worse. The serious grace or pious cheerfulness of the sunshine gossip, tricked out in gauds of language foreign to her original condition and purpose, would be resolved into grotesque jocoseness. No, in the first instance, the only voice to be heard in the moment of communion with the dial should be that of the neighbouring stream, still musical after a thousand years, or the lark's vesper song in the blue above, ere it descends to repose beneath the sod of the field. In the other—dismantled and displaced—the dial should rest in some dusky corner, difficult of discovery, unvisited by any ray of light; and, if brought forth to its native day, its own whisper alone should be heard preaching to the hopes, the vanities, and the destiny of man.

"No dial motto has a proper flavour until its years exceed those of the American Republic. It must, at least, be seasoned by a century of winters, have slowly ripened between twice ten thousand summer and autumn suns. Its place should be known of the generations of

butterflies and birds; the creeping and clinging mosses should be old, constant friends. It is charms like these which stimulate the motto-hunters to seek for the dial in the village churchyards, near yew trees dark with the glooms of four hundred years, and in the lichened courts of ruined halls; in some Convent de la Quieta, whose very name breathes repose, and in the green and flowery silences of ancient gardens."

The sun-dial at Woodchurch has been converted into a cross, this transformation having been effected to celebrate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, but close examination reveals that this was really a reversion to the original, for the base is clearly of much greater antiquity than the stem, and it is probable that the sun-dial had usurped, in its turn, the position of the churchyard cross. This cross also exhibits a cavity in the steps on the east side, which may be an example of the practice of cutting such receptacles for offerings. Such cavities, it is believed, were also intended to hold water or vinegar for the disinfection of coins in time of pestilence.

The churchyard crosses are usually placed in the south side of the church, and

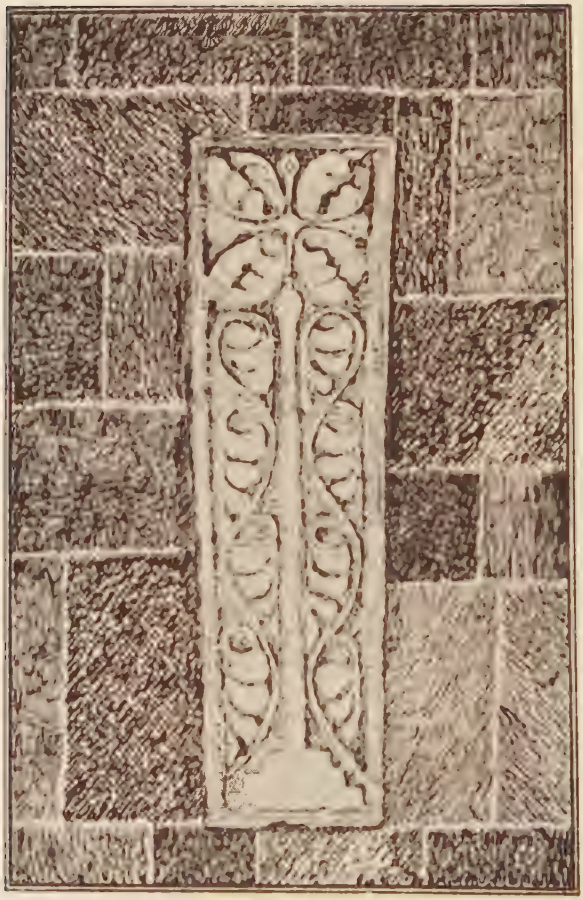
are often spoken of in history as Palm crosses. "It was at a churchyard cross that the out-door procession of palms, having wended its way thither, would always halt; and the cross itself being wreathed and decked with flowers and branches, the Blessed Sacrament, so solemnly borne in procession, was temporarily deposited before it upon some suitable throne, while the second station was being made. This done the procession reformed and proceeded to the principal door for the third station, before passing again within the church."

A curious post-Reformation use for churchyard crosses is quoted by Aymer Vallance in "Old Crosses and Lych-gates," "In ancient times when it was a necessity to exterminate certain animals, as foxes, wolves, etc., a reward was given to those who captured these animals, and it was usual to attach their heads to the cross in the churchyard for the purpose of valuing them. Generally the heads remained on the cross for three church services, and after that the reward was given. For a wolf's head the same sum was awarded as was given for the capture of the greatest robber; for (dog) foxes

2/6, and (vixens) 1/6." In the parish registers of several of the Wirral churches there are recorded the payment of such sums as, for example, at Eastham :—

1698	For Hedgehogs	6s. per dozen
	For Kites	10d., 4d., or 2d. each
	For Foxes	1s. each

Unfortunately the iconoclastic movement of Puritan days resulted in the destruction of many of the churchyard crosses, so that to-day all that remain are a pedestal and stump at Lower Bebington, and the pedestal at Woodchurch. This was the result of the passing of a Puritan Act of Parliament, entitled "Monuments of Superstition or Idolatry to be demolished." This ordinance provided that "all crosses upon all and every . . . . churches or chappels or other places of Publique prayer, churchyards, or other places to any of the said churches . . . . belonging or in any other open place, shall before the . . . . . day of November (1643) be taken away and defaced, and none of the like hereafter permitted in any such church . . . . or other places aforesaid." Local committees were constituted for carrying out the orders of Parliament. So it is that, save for the



From an original Pen-drawing by the Author

OLD SEPULCHRAL CROSS
BURTON

two churches mentioned, little remains standing to-day of the old churchyard crosses of Wirral.

Grave crosses have fared better. Preaching crosses and market crosses might fall into ruin, and roods and crucifixes be wantonly destroyed, but the cross carved in stone, or cut in stone above the grave, is found in all ages. The most primitive form of the grave cross in Britain was a rudely shaped pillar of stone upon which the holy symbol was cut. At a later date the stone itself was hewn, more of less roughly, into a cruciform shape. Flat stones engraved with the sign and placed upon the grave were of still later introduction. Of these Wirral possesses several very fine examples, though they have now been removed from the churchyards and placed, for better protection, within the churches themselves. At Burton there is a very fine sepulchral cross built into the wall of the porch. It is believed to be at least 600 years old. A very similar slab is seen in the Lady Chapel of the Priory of St. Mary and St. James, Birkenhead. It lies to the north side of the altar, side by side with other sepulchral crosses, one of which is the

tombstone of Thomas Rayneford, the last Prior of Birkenhead Monastery.

The inscription on the latter is in Latin, the following being a translation :—

> "Here lieth Thomas Rayneford, formerly the good Prior of this House, who died the 8th of May in the year of our Lord, 1473.
>
> May God be gracious to his soul."

Other crosses of this type are seen in the Charles Dawson Brown Museum, West Kirby. They were dug up in the environs of the church.

The original purpose of the finely carved fragments of stone and crosses at Neston, placed at the west end of the interior of the church, is not known.

Most of the old churchyards of Wirral are provided with the orthodox yew tree, and one of these, namely that at Eastham, is of immense antiquity. We are so accustomed to the presence of a yew tree in a churchyard that we are inclined to regard it as almost a necessary occupant, yet its position in consecrated ground is due neither to statutory enactment nor to ecclesiastical law. Some of its function and origin has already been discussed in the "Beauty and Interest of Wirral."

Amongst other uses for which the old trees have been employed is that they were the meeting place of the council of the "Hundred," in which case the yew tree at Eastham may sometimes have usurped the function of the Wirral stone, which stands at the corner of the Burton-Willaston road as it crosses the old Chester road. Seats were often placed under their shade, as is evidenced by frequent entries in the churchwardens' accounts. The often mentioned statement, that yew tree branches were carried in the procession on Palm Sunday in lieu of palm or olive branches, is borne out in the following paragraph taken from Caxton's "Liber Festivals," 1483 :—

"For encheson [reason] that we have none olyúe that berith green leef therefore we take Ewe in stede of palme and olyúe and beren aboute in procession and so is thys day callyd palme sonday."

The church porch may be fittingly considered in this chapter since it was regarded in olden times as being outside the building. Thus it was that baptisms were originally carried out in the church porch, as no unbaptized person was permitted to enter the church itself. Later

the first portion of the ritual only was enjoined to be conducted in the porch, and the conclusion of the baptism performed in the church. Marriages were treated on the same lines, the phrase "taking a wife at the church door" reflecting this fact. Thus Chaucer says of the wife of Bath :—

"She was a worthy woman all her live,
Husbands at church door had she five."

The concluding portion only of the wedding ceremony was held before the altar. As late as 1625 it is recorded that Charles I was married by proxy to Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII of France, at the church door of the cathedral of Notre Dame.

The use of the church porch for penance has already been referred to in the "Beauty and Interest of Wirral," and need not be developed here. Suffice it to say that the penitents, clad in a white sheet down to the ground and carrying a white wand, were required to resort to the parish church porch, and there stand from the second peal for morning prayer until the reading of the second lesson, "beseeching the people that pass into the church" to pray to God for their forgive-

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

OLD NORMAN DOORWAY
SHOTWICK

ness. Records of these practices exist in the Bishop's visitation in connection with Shotwick church. The porch also seems to have carried with it some rights of sanctuary.

All church porches are customarily provided with seats, but the need for this provision was greater in the days before pews and seats were introduced into the church. In those days it was no small undertaking to stand through a lengthy service after, perhaps, an arduous walk or ride, and pilgrims, as has been seen, needed to refresh themselves with a certain amount of repose before they entered the church. In those days, as now on the continent, people would drop in for a portion of the service, the present habit of arriving punctually at the beginning and staying till the end being comparatively modern.

In old English parish churches the porch had many secular functions. When a man was to be outlawed, it was in the church porch that the first processes were performed by the sheriff, and in the present day custom of posting civic notices inside church porches we have a survival of the days when the porch

served the functions of an ancient "city gate." Sometimes business transactions were conducted in the porch as a guarantee of good faith, just as the town cross was intended to remind the buyers and sellers in the public market of their christian obligations of honesty and fair dealing. Again, to give greater sanctity to an agreement, it was often stipulated that it should be executed in the church porch. Francis Bond quotes the following interesting examples of this in his "English Church Architecture." In 1592 the Vicar of Sonning, Berks., left a legacy to each of his daughters, "to be paid in the church porch." In 1462 John Lea covenanted, on annual payment to him of 6/8 in the south porch of Market Harborough, to keep the chimes "in good, sweet, solemn, and perfect time of musick." In the diocese of St. Asaph, the interest of £5 was left in 1712 for the purchase of flannel for four old men and women, who were to draw lots or throw dice for it in the church porch. In the south porch of Eye church, Suffolk, is a stone ledge, which may be a dole table or a counter on which payments of money might be laid.

Photograph by the Author

HOLY WATER STOUP
WOODCHURCH

In the porch at Woodchurch there is a recess to the right of the doorway, which is the remains of a stoup for holy water. The stoup or stock was placed there so that worshippers, when they entered the sacred building, might dip the fingers of the right hand into the water and bless themselves with the sign of the cross. As the *benedictio aquæ* usually took place once a week, before Sunday mass, the stoup was on that day refilled. In this ceremony salt was first exorcised and then blessed. The salt was then thrown into the water "*in modum crucis*" and another blessing was said over the two thus mixed. In one of the articles of visitation of Bishop Bonner, A.D. 1554, it is asked "Whether there be at the entry of the church or within the door of the same, an holy water stock or pot, having in it holy water to sprinkle upon the enterer, to put him in remembrance both of his promise made at the time of his baptism, and of the shedding and sprinkling of Christ's blood upon the cross for his redemption; and also to put him in remembrance that, as he washes his body, so he should not forget to wash and cleanse his soul, and make it fair with virtuous and godly good

living; and finally to put him in remembrance that, as water passeth and slideth away, so he shall not tarry and abide in this world, but pass and slide away as the water doth."

The making of holy water was abolished by the Reformers, and nearly all stoups were destroyed, mutilated or blocked up, but there is a survival of the making of holy water in the service for the baptism of children and adults, wherein the priest prays "Sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin."

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CHAPTER V.

WIRRAL CHURCH DEDICATIONS.

" Let us mount the church steps here,
Under the doorway's sacred shadow."
Longfellow.

THE object of consecrating a church, according to Richard Hooper's " Ecclesiastical Polity," is two-fold; first it declares that the building is no longer private property but belongs to God; secondly, it signifies that it is to be put to a divine use. Modern ecclesiologists affirm that the dedication of a church is equivalent to placing it under the protection of a particular saint, and that the practice arose from the desire to secure the intercession of one of the Court of the Heavenly King on behalf of the parish and its benefactors. Whatever the origin,

the custom of dedication is a very ancient one, and the early Christians did but take over a practice already indulged in by the Hebrews, for the first, second, and third Temples at Jerusalem were each dedicated.

The early Christian dedications were only valid if performed by a bishop, and though inferior clergy occasionally consecrated a church in emergency, such action was condemned. The following interesting ritual is quoted in Maskell's "Monumenta Ritualia Ecclesiæ Anglicananæ":— "When any church is to be hallowed, this order must be observed. First of all the people must depart out of the church, and the deacon must remain there only, having all the doors shut fast unto him. The bishop with the clergy shall stand without before the church door and make holy water mingled with salt. In the mean season, within the church there must be set up twelve candles burning before twelve (consecration) crosses that are appointed upon the church walls. Afterward the bishop, accompanied by the clergy and people, shall go thrice about the church without; and the bishop, having in his hand a staff with a bunch of hyssop on the end, shall with the same

cast holy water on the church walls. And the bishop shall come unto the church door, and strike the threshold with his crozier staff, and shall say, *Tollite portas* (Psalm xxiv.7).

Then shall the deacon that is within say, *Quis est iste Rex gloriæ?* To whom the bishop shall answer, *Dominus fortis, dominus fortis in praelio.* At the third time the deacon shall open the church door, and the bishop shall enter into the church accompanied with a few ministers, the clergy and the people abiding still without. Entering into the church, the bishop shall say, *Pax huit domui.* And afterwards the bishop, with them that are in the church, shall say the Litany. These things done, there must be made in the pavement of the church a cross of ashes and sand, whereon the whole alphabet or Christ's cross shall be written in Greek and Latin letters.

After these things the bishop must hallow another water with salt and ashes and wine, and consecrate the altar. Afterwards the twelve crosses that are painted upon the church walls, the bishop must anoint them with chrism, commonly called cream. These things once done,

the clergy and the people may freely come into the church, and ring the bells for joy."

Having discovered the dedication of any church, one is instantly faced with the interesting problem as to the reasons for the choice. This presents many difficulties and at best can often only be guesswork. No one, for example, appears to know why the Parish church of Neston is dedicated to St. Helen and St. Mary. Compound dedications are not uncommon, and the connection between the two members is usually apparent. Thus many churches are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and Child, and three churches in England are dedicated to St. Helen and the Invention of the Cross. Occasionally the compound form is due to the union of two parishes. Possibly that at Neston was originally to St. Helen alone, and St. Mary was added in order to obtain further and more potent intercession.

In the case of Burton and Shotwick Parish churches the geographical situation has undoubtedly determined their dedication, for the former is dedicated to St. Nicholas, the patron saint of ships and sailors, reminding us that Burton was

once a port, while at Shotwick St. Michael was chosen as a saint peculiarly protective to places of military importance, for Shotwick Castle commanded the Dee fords. St. Hilary's, Wallasey, is supposed to be a memorial of that saint's successful war against the Pelagian teaching, for tradition states that the church was founded by St. Germanus of Gaul, who was sent to Britain by Hilary to uproot the heresy in this country. St. Bridget's, West Kirby, is believed by some to owe its dedication to St. Patrick, who founded churches in Ireland, and naturally preferred to trust to the intercession of one of his national saints.* St. Hildeburgh's, Hoylake, which is a modern church, is an example of traditional association, as the cell on Hilbre was supposed to be dedicated to that saint. It is open to question, however, whether St. Hildeburgh is not a mythical personage.

* During the period of St. Bridget's fame, there was considerable intercourse between Wales and Ireland. This may account for the West Kirby dedication. It may be mentioned that the Celtic Christians dedicated their churches either to one of the Apostles or to some local Saint. It is not improbable that St. Bridget visited West Kirby. It should further be noted that she was born only five or six years before the death of St. Patrick.

C. Brooke Gwynne.

Taking now the Wirral old churches in turn, and considering the legends and traditions which have gathered round the names of certain saints, it will be found an interesting study to seek in the fabric of the several buildings reminiscences and symbols of the dedication.

Thus in West Kirby church, over the south choir in the chancel, is a three-light window picturing Saint Bridget; on the left she is kneeling by a prie-dieu holding a lily in her hand; in the middle light she kneels, while from the nimbus around her there proceed flames; in the right she stands attired as a nun with a book in one hand and a shepherd's staff in the other. All three are traditional representations of this saint. At one time a figure of St. Bridget stood on a bracket at the east end of the north aisle.

St. Bridget is remembered by 18 other dedications in England besides that of West Kirby, but in Ireland, of course, her churches are almost numberless. The virtues of this saint are unctuously set forward in an ancient homily preserved in the library of the Royal Irish Academy :—

"There hath never been any one more bashful or more modest than that holy

virgin; she never washed her hands or her face or her feet amongst men; she never looked a man in the face; she never spoke without a blush. She was abstinent, innocent, generous, patient; she joyed in God's commandments; she was steadfast, lowly, forgiving, charitable. She was a consecrated vessel for keeping Christ's body; she was a temple of God; her heart and her mind were a throne of rest for the Holy Ghost. Towards God she was simple; towards the wretched compassionate; her miracles and wondrous deeds like the sand of the sea; her soul like the sun in the heavenly city among quires of angels and archangels, in union with cherubim and seraphim, in union with all the Holy Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Ghost. I, the writer, beseech the Lord's mercy through St. Bridget's intercession. Amen."

Many similar stories of saints exist which deprecate the married state and praise virginity, a phase in the history of the church which has been suggested as an intentional stimulus for the recommendation of clerical celibacy. Thus it is related of St. Bridget that she was so beautiful that all men desired her. She

therefore prayed that her beauty might be lost, and a distemper falling upon her caused the loss of an eye. But when she received the veil the lost eye and the old loveliness both returned.

Thurstaston church is dedicated to St. Bartholomew, but so little attention has been paid thereto that the building does not appear to contain a single emblem of him. A niche over the north doorway stands empty, and it is to be presumed that the architect originally intended it to contain a figure of the saint. The large number of 165 churches in England are dedicated to St. Bartholomew, though he plays so small a part in Biblical history. It has been suggested that the reason for his popularity rests in the numerous legends concerning his relics, as half the churches on the continent in the Middle Ages seemed to boast some relic of this Apostle, and an arm was brought to Canterbury by Anselm as a genuine fragment.

Heswall Parish church is now dedicated to St. Peter, though there appears to be some doubt as to the original dedication, which was lost in 1879 when the church was re-built. Harold Young, in his

"A Perambulation of the Hundred of Wirral," states that it was a compound dedication to St. Peter and St. Joseph of Arimathea, these two being associated traditionally with missionary work in England. There are no suggestions of the latter dedication in the church now, but the side chapel is called the chapel of St. Peter, and its windows represent scenes in the Apostle's life. There is also a small statue of St. Peter under a bracket on the left hand side.

As has already been noted, the Parish church at Neston carries the compound dedication of St. Helen and St. Mary. The former has a large number of dedications in the country, but no other in Wirral, though that of the Holy Cross at Woodchurch is an allied dedication; for St. Helen was the reputed discoverer of the true cross, and the 3rd of May is set aside in the Roman calendar as "*Inventio Crucis*" to celebrate the day. It is stated that Helen cut off a large portion of the cross and sent it to Rome, where there was built to receive it the famous church of St. Croce. In America numerous places bear the name

of Vera Cruz, because their churches were believed to have contained fragments of the True Cross.

Of the authenticity of this discovery there is much doubt, but many facts are known about St. Helen, derived, for the most part, from the history of Eusebius, a contemporary. St. Ambrose states that she was an innkeeper's daughter, and this was the general belief. Be this as it may, Constantius, the nephew of the reigning Emperior Claudius, met her and married her, this resulting in the birth of a son who became Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor of Rome. For his mother the Emperor showed the greatest honour. She was styled Augusta and Imperatrix, and gold coins were stamped bearing her image. Eusebius states that "she seemed from her tender years to have been taught by the Saviour Himself," and that, though nearly eighty years of age, she "had a youthful spirit and the greatest healthiness both of body and of mind." Her visit to Jerusalem is historical, and while in Palestine she founded the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. History records that she was a noble and gracious woman, and worthy of canonis-

ation apart from her reputed discovery of the cross.

Dedications to Mary, the mother of our Lord, are the most numerous of any in England, reaching the extraordinary total of 2,335, this including the various titles accorded to her such as "The Blessed Virgin," "Our Lady," "St. Mary, the Virgin," etc. These are found at Birkenhead Priory, where there is the compound dedication to the Blessed Virgin and St. James; at Neston and at Eastham. But, as emblems of the Virgin Mary are to be found in many churches not dedicated to her, the search for symbolic treatment of the building has not the same interest. It may be sufficient, therefore, to state that she is usually represented wearing a blue robe, a veil the emblem of virginity, and carrying a lily as the emblem of purity.

The name of St. Nicholas, to whom Burton church is dedicated, is rich in legendary ornament. He was born in Panthera, a city of Lycia in Asia Minor, in the third century, the son of rich Christian parents. He is the patron saint of mariners, children, of Russians, and of wolves. Indeed it is stated that on St. Nicholas day (Dec. 6th), wolves will not

touch the most tempting and harmless creature, and that they spend the night in such devout meditation that it is safe to tread upon their tails! St. Nicholas gave lavishly the wealth which he inherited from his parents, and there is a story that in Lycia there was a nobleman with three daughters, so poor that he was about to send them forth to earn their bread by a life of shame. But one night Nicholas threw a purse of gold through the window, and with this dowry the poor nobleman procured marriage for the eldest daughter. A second night Nicholas again threw a purse of gold, and with this the second daughter was dowried and married. So also with the third daughter. Thus, St. Nicholas is represented by three purses carved on the choir-master's desk in Burton church. He is further pictured in the left light of the east window, holding a book on which rest three purses, and there is still another representation of him painted on a board and hung upon the tower wall within the nave.

St. Michael appears to have been ignored by the architects or restorers of Shotwick church, and at Backford the dedicatory saint is apparently held in no

greater esteem. But St. Oswald has two churches in Wirral, Backford and Bidston. In history St. Oswald was associated with St. Edwin, each being slain by Penda, the heathen king of Mercia. St. Edwin was the first Christian king of Northumbria; it was his Queen Ethelburga who brought with her from Kent St. Paulinus as her chaplain. In 627 King Edwin was baptized in the church of St. Peter, York, the first York Minster. In 636 he was defeated and slain by Penda. His successor, King Oswald, was one of the greatest and best of all kings we have had in England, to be ranked with the French St. Louis and our own Alfred. He fell in 642. His skull was preserved at Lindisfarne.

At Bidston this patron saint is portrayed in a window at the west end of the south aisle, and in a finely executed wood carving in the central panel of the pulpit.

Stoak church is dedicated to St. Lawrence, who was a deacon of Rome and was martyred in 258 A.D. by being broiled to death. On this account representations of this saint usually show a grid-iron. Very little is known of him, but tradition

Photograph by the Author

ST. OSWALD'S, BACKFORD
(Notice Early English East Window)

affirms that he was an administrator of charities of the metropolitan church. He appears in ecclesiastical history for only three days of his life. It was in the year 258, when there arose the persecution under the Emperor Valerian. One of the victims of this persecution was Sixtus, Bishop of the Roman church, who was arrested as he sat teaching in the pontifical chair. St. Lawrence, who stood near as a pupil, cried "Whither goest thou O my father without thy son and servant? Am I unworthy to accompany thee to death? Shall the priest go to the sacrifice without his attendant deacon?" Thus Lawrence parted from his master, tradition stating that he went his way distributing money to the poor so openly that he was brought up on the accusation of possessing concealed wealth. Gathering a crowd of the poor together, he replied, "These are the churches' riches." This bold defiance of the Roman prefect resulted in his being tortured by roasting over a slow fire. It is said that, in the middle of this torture, he taunted his persecutors, crying "I am done enough: now turn and eat me." Thus died Lawrence, the Stephen of the Western church.

There are no emblems of St. Lawrence to be seen now at Stoak.

St. Andrew has always been a very popular dedication, and Lower Bebington church is but one of 637 in this country which are dedicated to him, a mark of favour due more to the legendary material that has gathered round his name than to the Scriptural narrative. The story goes that, after the gift of tongues at the feast of Pentecost, the Apostles drew lots to decide the places to which each should be sent, and it fell to the lot of St. Matthew that he should go to Wrondon, or the City of Dogs, whither he departed. There he was cast into prison and sentenced to be executed at the expiration of thirty days, but during his imprisonment the Lord Christ appeared to him and promised to send St. Andrew to his succour.

Twenty-seven days afterwards, Our Lord called St. Andrew and his companions and took them away in a ship, the crew whereof consisted of Christ Himself and two angels. They landed at Wrondon and proceeded to the prison, where the jailors fell dead, with the result that St. Matthew and the other prisoners were

liberated, and immediately translated to a mountain where St. Peter awaited them.

Meanwhile in the city the escape of the prisoners was discovered, and lots were cast to find the guilty person, who was to be slain and eaten for food. But, instead of the victim decided upon, his son and daughter were substituted, and led off to the place of execution where St. Andrew met them, and by the exercise of prayer prevented the sacrifice. The Apostle was then denounced by the devil, arrested, and put to torture, but the same night his wounds were healed and the city inundated. St. Andrew then escaped; the floods ceased, and the dead were restored to life; the father of the two victims and the executioner being swallowed up alive.

This outrageous legend came from the imagination of one Leucius Charinus, but, though it was declared heretical by Pope Gelasius as early as the vth century, the story had gripped Christendom and resulted in the extraordinary popularity of the saint as a protector of churches.

The figure of St. Andrew occupies a niche on the north side of the altar at Bebington church; the niche is ancient, but the statue is modern. It is of particular

interest to note that on St. Andrew's day the figure of the saint is illumined by the sunlight through a high window in the south wall of the chancel, a window placed there apparently for that purpose, a wonderfully poetic and beautiful symbol. St. Andrew is traditionally represented as an old man with a long flowing beard, holding a cross saltire.

The last of the old churches to be noted is St. Hilary's, Wallasey. Originally Hilary was a layman, an official attached to the court of the provincial governor in Poitiers. He was married and had one daughter. He was made Bishop of Poitiers, 383 A.D., and he was chosen not only on account of his piety, but because of his strong defence of the Catholic Faith against the Pelagian form of the Arian heresy. This heresy concerned itself with the relationship of the Son to the Father, and so widely was it diffused that people of that day talked of little else. Thus Dean Stanley, in his "History of the Eastern Church," quotes Eusebius :—

"Bishop rose against Bishop, district against district. So violent were the discussions that they were parodied in the pagan theatres, and the Emperor's statues

were broken in the public squares in the conflicts which took place. The common name by which the Arians and their system were designated (and we may conclude that they were not wanting in retorts) was the maniacs, the Ariomaniacs, the Ariomania : and their frantic conduct on public occasions afterwards goes far to justify the appellation. Sailors, millers, and travellers sang the disputed doctrines at their occupations or on their journeys : every corner, every alley of the city was full of these discussions—the streets, the market places, the drapers, the money changers, the victuallers. Ask a man ' how many oboli,' he answers by dogmatising on generated and ungenerated being. Inquire the price of bread, and you are told ' The Son is subordinate to the Father.' Ask if the bath is ready, and you are told ' The Son arose out of nothing.' "

Hilary was banished by an ecclesiastical council to Phrygia, the precise reasons not being clear. He was in exile for a little over six years. It has been questioned whether the Wallasey dedication to St. Hilary is genuine, and the point has been raised as to whether the present name is

not a corruption of St. Eilian, the Welsh Pilgrim saint. In the church at Wallasey, St. Hilary is represented in the mid light of the first window of the north aisle carrying a book and treading on a serpent. This is his traditional representation, the serpent symbolising the Arian heresy.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD FONTS OF WIRRAL.

" Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Criede
Leren ye childe yt is nede."

An Ancient Font Inscription.

WHEN one looks upon the ruins of an old house, such as that at Poole, or upon some ancient relic such as Thor's stone, Thurstaston, the most somnolent imagination is stirred by the thought of the past associations, and it is the habit of most observers to colour what they see with reminiscences of those stirring scenes and incidents which they believe to have been enacted on the very spot upon which they stand. Yet the present writer ventures to suggest that the same poetic or historic imagery is rarely pictured by those who look upon an old church font. If the font be a genuine antique, the keen archæologist condescends to describe it

in some learned paper. If it is very beautiful in design and craftsmanship, the artist is willing to add his quota of praise. But there, for the most part, the matter ends, and the interesting local colour with which most fonts may be painted remains unheeded.

Even ecclesiologists seem to have paid comparatively little attention to fonts, while the carelessness with which these venerable relics are cast into the churchyard, the rectory garden, or even the rubbish heap, testifies to the unmerited obloquy they have received. Thus the old Norman font at Wallasey oscillated for several generations between the church interior and the rectory garden. The font at Neston suffered similar treatment; at Thurstaston an old font of uncertain date has stood for years in a lonely position in the churchyard, where it is permitted to usurp the lowly functions of a plant pot; and in the grounds of the Abbey Manor, West Kirby, there was found a font which probably came from the parish church and seems to have been used as a drinking trough.*

* This font is being removed to the Charles Dawson Brown Museum, West Kirby.

C. Brooke Gwynne.

This very common and regrettable treatment of fonts leads one to enquire how it is that the reverence usually paid to church fabric and furniture has been denied to this particular ornament.

It is, of course, to be expected that the harsh treatment meted to all ecclesiastical things at the time of the suppression of the monasteries would have been extended to fonts. They, like the images, crosses, and so forth, were exposed to the iconoclastic fury of the Puritans, who further showed their contempt by wilful desecration comparable to the historic attempt of Caligula to sacrifice swine upon the altar of the Temple of Jerusalem. Thus at Yaxley, in Huntingdon, and in St. Paul's Cathedral the Puritans baptized colts in the fonts, while at Lostwithiel, Cornwall, a horse was brought to the font and christened "Charles" in contempt of His Sacred Majesty.

These outrages read painfully to us now, yet there was some extenuation for the offences committed, since they were a protest against the abuses of the pre-Reformation church. History also records the destruction of at least one font, that at Marden, in Kent, which was

demolished by the rector of Staplehurst to prove the courage of his conviction that "Infant baptism was a delusion and a snare contrary to Scripture and the custom of the English Church." But no such pleas can be urged in extenuation of the ill treatment accorded to many fonts in our own day. It is, of course, argued that the old fonts were never consecrated, but only the water that they contained, though there are records existing of the actual consecration of certain fonts as, for example, that in Oxford Cathedral.

The fact is that the rite of baptism has depreciated in importance since the days of the primitive church. The early baptisms were for the most part adult, a fact which in itself lent a peculiar seriousness to a rite that might be the first step on the "crimson road to martyrdom." Consequently the ritual was made specially momentous in its detail. The catechumen was first stripped naked to symbolise the nakedness of Christ upon the cross. Then followed a preliminary anointing, after which there was semi-immersion of the body, plus triple immersion of the head. The laying on of hands was then performed; then the forehead,

ears, nostrils and breast were anointed. The catechumen was next clad in the white robes of purity and regeneration, in preparation for the Eucharist which followed. Afterwards, in white robed procession, the whole body of baptized Christians filed into the adjoining church. Baptism did not originally take place in a church. The baptism of Our Lord Himself was in the Jordan. Philip baptized the Ethiopian by the road side (Acts viii. 38), Tertullian says that St. Peter baptized in the Tiber, and the early Christian missionaries baptized in streams or lakes or even in the sea.

Many baptisms among the first Roman converts occurred in the bathrooms of private houses, and the early baptisteries appear to have been modelled upon Roman *thermæ*. Doubtless open air baptisms were more convenient in the days when great numbers of converts were baptized at any one time, but there was also the feeling that baptism was the rite of initiation into the church, and that no uninitiated person should be allowed to enter its holy precincts. This is the reason why the early baptisms were conducted in the church porch.

Then gradually, the practice of infant baptism increased, and by the VIIIth century this had become the rule. Thus in 789, pre-occupied with the peril in which children appeared to stand who were not baptized, the Emperor Charlemagne ordered that all infants should be baptized when one year old, and for this purpose fonts were placed in churches. In England a canon of the year 960 required that baptism be not delayed after the thirty-seventh day from birth, and from the XIth century infants were baptized within a few days of birth.

An inevitable change naturally took place in regard to the Church's attitude to the rite. It was no longer felt to be the most momentous epoch in the life of the individual, and in importance it became secondary to the Eucharist. Francis Bond says " Of a function of such rare and exceptional occurrence the Church could make but little. On the other hand the Eucharist could be pressed, and was pressed, into daily use. Every day for hundreds and hundreds of years the Catholic Church has celebrated the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ; daily celebration of the Mass is still of

obligation to every priest of the Roman Catholic Church; so it was also in the English Church before the Reformation. It was on this solemn rite, then, far more than on that of baptism, that the church relied as a means to bring its people to the worship and contemplation of God. For this reason also the one rite waxed in importance, the other waned—it could not be otherwise."

With the steady increase in the custom of infant baptism the great baptismal piscina ceased to exist, and the font took its place. But for a considerable time the font reflected the piscina, and the earliest types were simply tubs. Such is the shape of the font at Burton, this font probably being a copy of an older one. Then it became common to mount the font on a pedestal, a course obviously dictated by convenience. For, when an adult came to be baptized, it was easy for him to step into the piscina and for water to be poured over his head, but in the case of infants a low font meant an awkward stooping posture for the priest.

The font at Lower Bebington represents one of these early pedestal forms, though it is considered by some archæo-

logists that the pedestal is not so old as the bowl. After that, the Gothic modes resulted in the more beautiful shapes that are seen in the XIIIth, XIVth and XVth century fonts at Shotwick, Neston and Woodchurch respectively. It is indeed surprising that so many fonts escaped the destruction of the Reformation days, for many a churchwarden of that period endeavoured to prove the soundness of his Protestant principles by smashing the font and substituting a basin for it, so that the practice of such substitution had to be forbidden. Thus Elizabeth in 1561 directed "that the font be not moved from the accustomed place, and that in Parryshe churches the Curates take not upon them to conferre Baptisme in Basens but in the font customablye used." During the Commonwealth fonts were frequently replaced, and many a parish register records such an entry as "bought a bassin to cristen the children which cost three shilling sixpence." But with the Restoration the font came into its own again.

The attempt to attach an elaborate symbolism to the design of fonts is now deprecated. Thus the octagonal font, such as those at Shotwick and Wood-

church, was stated to embody the fact that our Lord rose from the grave eight days after the crucifixion, and doubtless the emblems of the Passion which surround Woodchurch font would give colour to this view in the eyes of many people. Another theory is that, since the old world and the first man were created in seven days, the new world of grace and regeneration and the new man must have been created on the eighth day, of which facts the eight-sided font is the outward symbol. Circular fonts again are held to symbolise the idea that in baptism imperfect man is made perfect. But so many six or seven-sided fonts, and oval fonts exist, as well as other forms, that none of these theories are now regarded as tenable.

The surviving fonts in Wirral may now be described in detail, placing them as far as possible in the order of their antiquity. Of these Eastham would appear to come an easy first, as it has been pronounced by some experts to be possibly even pre-Conquest in date. Fonts would appear to have existed from the IXth century, though not in churches, and such as are believed to survive are of the type of that

at Eastham, circular and without ornament.

The font in Lower Bebington church is believed to be coeval with the Norman work of the south wall and nave arcade of the building. The bowl is circular and made of white stone, with a fillet below the rim bearing a row of small open depressions, the remainder of the circumference being occupied by six plain panels of unequal size. The pedestal is an octagonal cone.

Wallasey font is a massive circular bowl made of local stone, and having an incised arcading round the sides of round-topped arches. Above is a dog-toothed moulding, and below a cable. This font is of early Norman date. Like the church it has suffered harsh treatment, for in 1760 it was turned out into the rectory garden, where it remained till 1834, when it was restored. But a new font was given to the church in 1856, and the old one sent back to the garden, whence it was salved thirty years later by Canon Gray. Of this font Mr. Fergusson Irvine says that it so closely resembles the one at Eyam, in Derbyshire, that one is tempted to believe that they were cut by the same

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

NORMAN FONT
BEBINGTON

mason. This font has now been placed in St. Luke's church, Poulton, the parish having been divided. It stands in the baptistery at the west end and is mounted on a new pedestal. At the back of the bowl there is seen a place filled in with new stone. This repairs a gap made by Cromwell's soldiers, who knocked out a piece of the bowl in order to use it as a drinking trough for their horses, and provide a place for the animals' necks.

Burton font is of recent date, but it is of a style similar to the XIth century Lincolnshire fonts. In one corner of the churchyard of Heswall parish church there is a XIIIth century font of a sundial pattern, and another XIIIth century example is found at Shotwick.

Woodchurch and Neston possess XVth century fonts. The former is by far the finest, though it can hardly be said to deserve the extraordinary eulogium bestowed upon it by William Mortimer, in his "History of the Hundred of Wirral," where he states that it is "almost unique," and that "there are not more than two others in the kingdom of greater antiquity or more expensive design." It is true that this font is the only one of its kind in

Wirral, but even so it is by no means the oldest, as we have seen. The bowl of the Woodchurch font is of the usual octagonal pattern, supported at each of its angles by a quaintly carved angel with outstretched wings. The stem is sculptured with emblems of the Passion, namely, a flagellum, a cross, a crown of thorns, pincers and nail, and a mallet. These do not complete the emblems of the Passion which include the ladder, the thirty pieces of silver, the dice-board and the dice, the seamless robe, the cock, the spear, the sword, the pillar and the scourges, the hammer, the goblet of vinegar, the fist that buffeted Him, the ewer used by Pilate, the cup of wine and myrrh, the lantern, the lance, a rope or chain for the deposition of the body, winding sheet, and spices in a vase.

Of the old font in the churchyard at Thurstaston, Dr. Ellis says, "It is impossible to determine the age of this ugly specimen; the narrowness of the bowl in proportion to its height is probably an indication of its being post-Reformation in date."

Wirral fonts do not boast any extraordinarily beautiful covers, nevertheless

the latter have some intrinsic interest. The origin of the cover is perfectly well known, and arose from the need to protect the hallowed water from being used for illicit purposes, for the consecration of the water involved a lengthy ritual, including such symbolic acts as the pouring of oil over the surface of the water in the form of a cross, the plunging into the water of two lighted tapers, and its insufflation by the bishop. And so the hallowed water was allowed to remain in the font for a considerable time, and was not changed for each baptism as now.

But, unfortunately, the superstition of the mediæval age occasioned the use of this water for magical purposes, so that it was frequently stolen. Thus in 1236 the Archbishop of Canterbury ordered that fonts were to be kept locked under seal, because the hallowed water was used in magic, and in the first English Prayer Book it was ordered that "the water in the Fonte shall be chaunged every moneth once at the least." It was the business of the parish to provide both font and cover, and in the locks which are attached to such old fonts, as those at Eastham and Bebington, we see the survival of these

customs and beliefs. Such covers were usually of oak, and varied in design from simple lids to the most ornate canopies. A Gothic font cover of considerable age is seen at Burton.

It was the custom in later days to place the font in the nave, usually in the neighbourhood of the south doorway, which thus came to be known as the "christening door." Before the Reformation the first part of the baptismal service was actually carried out in the church porch, and both the Sarum and the York Manuals begin the baptismal office with the rubric "First the child shall be carried to the doors of the church." Then the service began by the priest inquiring of the nurse the sex of the child. After certain ceremonies, the infant was invited into the church with the words "*Ingredere in Templum Dei ut habeas vitam aeternam et vivas in saecula saeculorum.* Amen"; after which the little catechumen was carried to the font for actual baptism. In the first Prayer Book of Edward VI (1594), the ancient custom was still maintained. The rubric directs that "then the Godfathers, Godmothers and people with the children must be ready at the

church dore . . . And then standing there, the prieste shall aske whether the chyldren be baptized or no. If they answere No, then shall the priest saye thus: Deare beloved, forasmuche as all men bee conceyved and borne in sinne," etc. At the conclusion of the first part of the service (which included the signing with the sign of the cross, and the reading of the Gospel and exhortation) the priest was ordered to " take one of the children by the right hande, the other being brought after him. And cuming into the Churche towarde the fonte saye: The Lord vouchsafe to receyve you into his holy household," etc. It is of interest that the font at Burton once stood at the east end of the church in the Massey chapel.

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CHAPTER VII.

OLD PEWS AND PULPITS IN WIRRAL CHURCHES.

" A bedstead of the antique mode,
Compact of timber many a load,
Such as our ancestors did use
Was metamorphosed into pews;
Which still their ancient nature keep
By lodging folks disposed to sleep."

From Swift's " Baucis and Philemon."

IN early days, when Wirral churches were first founded, pews had not come into existence, and the worshippers stood or knelt on a hard damp floor of clay or stone, though a stone bench in some instances might be against the north, south and west walls. The porch, however, was always provided with seats so that those who came from a distance might enjoy a rest before service.

Later came the introduction of straw mats for kneeling purposes, and we know that straw and rushes were very generally used for "strawing" the church. But the custom of strewing straw and rushes on the floor continued long after the introduction of pews in order to assist cleanliness, for roads in olden days were none too good, and the worshippers must have brought a good deal of dirt into the building.

West Kirby church registers record the practice of rush bearing in that parish. It was a festival which was attended by no small amount of merry-making and rejoicing. Various ways of celebrating this event occurred in different counties of England, and that of Cheshire has been described by a correspondent of "Notes and Queries" as follows:— "A large quantity of rushes—a cartload—is collected, and, being bound in the cart, are cut evenly at each end, and on Saturday evenings a number of men sit on the top of the rushes, holding garlands of artificial flowers, etc. The cart is drawn round the parish by three or four spirited horses decked with ribbons, the collars being surrounded with small bells. It is

attended by morris-dancers fantastically dressed; there are men in women's clothes, one of whom, with his face blackened, has a belt with a large bell attached round his waist, and carries a ladle to collect money from the spectators. The party stop and dance at the public house on their way to the parish church, where the rushes are deposited, and the garlands are hung up to remain till the next year."

The custom of rush bearing ceased at West Kirby in 1758.

"The term 'pew,' or 'pue,'" say Charles Cox and Alfred Harvey in their "English Church Furniture," "originally meant an elevated place or seat, and hence came to be applied to seats or enclosures in churches for persons of dignity or officials. But it is only of comparatively recent times that the term has gained an almost exclusively ecclesiastical use. Milton used the word to describe the sheep-pens of Smithfield, and Pepys applied it to a box at the theatre. Nor was pew always used to denote a separate or private seat or enclosure in connection with churches even in pre-Reformation days. Thus John Younge, of Herne, by will of 1458 gave 'to the fabric of the

church of Herne, viz., to make seats called puyinge x marks.' Nevertheless the word 'pew,' in its church signification, was for a long period assigned exclusively to an enclosed seat. The earliest known use of the term occurs in the famous poem of the Vision of Piers Ploughman, c. 1360. Wratthe, in his confession, says that he was accustomed to sit among wives and widows shut up in pews, adding that this was a fact well known to the parson of the parish.

'Among wyes and wodewes
Ich am ywoned seete
Yparroked in puwes
The parson him knoweth.'"

"Yparroked" means shut up or enclosed.

Sermons in early days were very brief, and the most that was attempted would be little moral discourses. Yet the congregation proved themselves restive even under these, so that we find Bishop Bentham in his Visitation articles directing the people "not to walk up and down in the church, nor to jangle, babble or talk in church time, but give diligent attention to the priest;" and, even long before the xvth century writers record the irreverent behaviour of the people who lolled about

and leaned against the pillars and walls—as well they might if the services were long.

Then arose the age of domestic comfort, and the necessity for seats in churches became pressing. The clergy had already allowed certain wealthy benefactors to occupy the chancel stalls (for the choir was seated from very early times), and it naturally became difficult to determine who should be excluded. Then movable benches and seats were gradually introduced into the nave, though the poorer people still went on standing. But it was not thought convenient to have the whole church seated, for the building was used during the week for storing such commodities as wool, grain, etc. Thus the Rev. J. A. Sparvel-Bayly, writing in 1896, says that an ancestor of his, who was a churchwarden, was once consulted by a non-resident Incumbent, who expressed a not unreasonable wish to perform service in the church of his parish. The churchwarden was obliged to reply that the people would have had much pleasure in seeing their rector among them, but the weather had been unsettled over the harvest and the church was full of his wheat!

The oldest pews in Wirral are at Shotwick, great square enclosures once fitted with locks and keys, as in Pepys' day, when he wrote :—

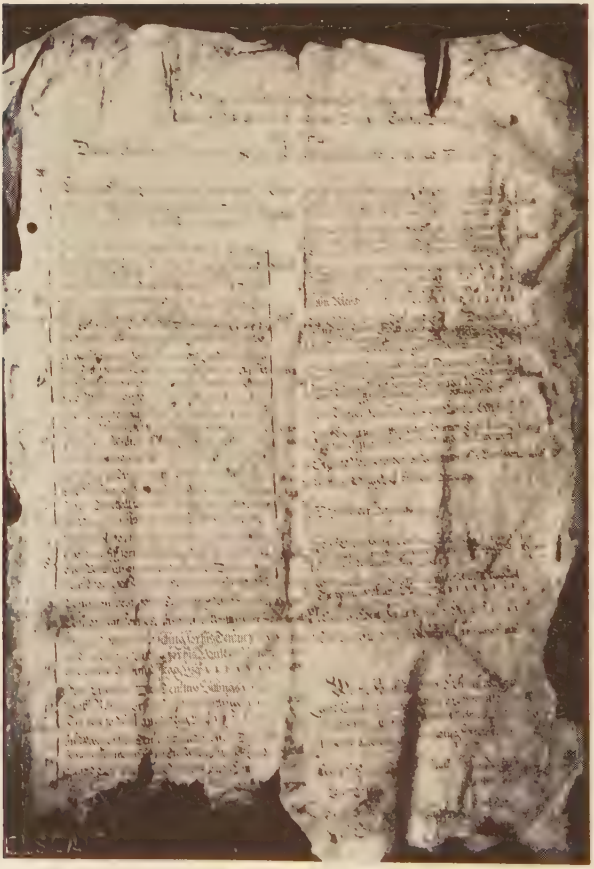
"Dec. 25th, 1661. In the morning to church, where at the door of our pew I was fain to stay, because the Sexton had not opened it."

Perhaps some of these pews at Shotwick were even reserved for dogs which followed the residents at the Hall to church, and for which in post-Reformation days such provision was sometimes made. People in those spacious times treated church-going in a very different spirit from that which now is encouraged. The pews of the rich were even known to be fitted out as rooms with fire places, and curtained off completely from the rest of the congregation, for sermons by this time had become long and apparently wearisome, and a discourse of several hours duration was not exceptional. Indeed the distinction between poor and rich too often received an unwholesome emphasis in church, and the arrangement of pews for parishioners being worked on a social system, created much bitter feeling and occasionally even produced open warfare in the parish. Disputes over questions of

precedency were even carried into the law courts, and there exists a record of a Cheshire quarrel between two families as to "which should sit highest in the church, and foremost go in processions," the following being the judicial decision given by twelve of the "most auncyent men of Astbury":— "that whither of the said gyntylmen may dispend in lands, by title of inheritance, ten marks or above more than the other, that he shall have the pre-eminence in sitting in the church and in going in procession, with all the like causes in that behalf."

At a synod at Exeter, the following order was made:— "We have heard that the parishioners of divers places do oftentimes wrangle about their seats in church, two or more claiming the same seat; whence arises great scandal to the church; and the divine offices are sore let and hindered. Wherefore we decree that none shall henceforth call any seat in the church his own, save noble persons and patrons. He, who for the cause of prayer shall first enter a church, let him select a place of prayer according to his will."

In Heswall church there is a curious old



Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

OLD PARCHMENT
HESWALL
SHOWING PEW ALLOCATIONS

parchment printed in Black Letter showing the pew allocations in 1780. In those days men and women did not sit together in church—a mode still advocated by certain parties to-day. The sexes, for example, were separated at Neston when the church was pewed in 1711, and the old records of Bishops' Visitations contain many instances of parishioners being brought up for non-compliance with this rule. Thus a certain Mr. Loveday was presented in 1620 for sitting in the same pew with his wife which, "being held to be highly indecent," he was ordered to appear; but failing to do so "Mr. Chancellor was made acquainted with his obstinacy." Many curious notices of separation of sexes, and the restriction of pews for women, occur in the old parish documents, and a distinction was even made between married and unmarried women. There is a case recorded of a young woman named Hayward, in the Diocese of London, "that she, beinge a young mayde, sat in the pewe with her mother to the great offence of many reverent women; howbeit that after I, Peter Lewis, the vicar, had in the church privatlie admonished the said young mayde of

her fault, and advised her to sit at her mother's pewe dore, she obeyed; but now she sits again with her mother." These customs probably owe their origin to Eastern influence.

Formerly in many churches there was a "churching pew," an institution which gave rise to amusing incidents. Thiselton Dyer, in his "Pews and their Lore," relates of two dashing young unmarried women journeying from London by coach, who were compelled by some accidental cause to spend Sunday at a village on their route. In the pride of their beauty and finery they made their way to church and selected the most conspicuous pew near the pulpit. But they soon wished themselves elsewhere, when the clergyman began reading the "Churching service" of the Church of England, and they were still more chagrined when they were asked to pay the customary fee for this service. Another story is related by the Rev. F. G. Lee in "Notes and Queries." "In a church near Oxford," says he, "which I once served as curate, there was a special pew, capacious and high, at the entrance of the church, where only women worshipped who desired the office of bene-

diction. One Sunday afternoon, three Oxford undergraduates, arriving during Evensong, hastily took their places in this particular pew, when, according to custom, towards the close of the service, the parson (who was short-sighted), looking up and seeing the pew occupied, immediately proceeded 'to church' these visitors, to the consternation of the congregation."

Note should be taken at Shotwick of the fine old canopied oak churchwardens' seat at the west end of the nave. The inscription on the front reads :—

Robert Coxson : James Gilbert :
Church : Wardens : 1709

Henry : Cowin : Will : Huntingdon :
16 Church : Wardens 73

R. Coxson was a yeoman of Great Saughall. James Gilbert was a Chester chandler, who was granted the freedom of the city in 1702. Will Huntingdon was a small farmer. Of Henry Cowin there appears no record. The pews at Stoak are of the same period, but they have been cut down and now present a modern appearance. At Burton the original pews form a fine oak panelling round the nave. Something of the same sort has been done

at Shotwick, where the woodwork behind the altar is from the old minstrels' pew which stood in the place of the present organ.

Church worship must have had its picturesque days when the choir was led by an amateur orchestra. It is pictured delightfully by Washington Irving in his inimitable "Sketch Book." Describing Christmas service, he writes, "The orchestra was in a small gallery and presented a most whimsical grouping of heads, piled one above the other, among which I particularly noticed that of the village tailor, a pale fellow with a retreating forehead and chin, who played on the clarionet, and seemed to have blown his face to a point; and there was another, a short pursy man, stooping and labouring at a bass-viol so as to show nothing but the top of a round bald head, like the egg of an ostrich. There were two or three pretty faces among the female singers, to which the keen air of a frosty morning had given a bright rosy tint; but the gentlemen choristers had evidently been chosen, like old cremona fiddles, more for tone than looks; and as several had to sing from the same book, there

were clusterings of odd physiognomies, not unlike those groups of cherubs we sometimes see on country tombstones.

The usual services of the choir were managed tolerably well, the vocal parts generally lagging a little behind the instrumental, and some loitering fiddler now and then making up for lost time by travelling over a passage with prodigious celerity, and clearing more bars than the keenest fox-hunter to be in at the death. But the great trial was an anthem that had been prepared and arranged by Master Simon, and on which he had founded great expectation. Unluckily there was a blunder at the very outset; the musicians became flurried; Master Simon was in a fever, everything went on lamely and irregularly until they came to a chorus beginning 'Now let us sing with one accord,' which seemed to be a signal for parting company; all became discord and confusion; each shifted for himself, and got to the end as well, or rather as soon, as he could, excepting one chorister in a pair of horn spectacles bestriding and pinching a long sonorous nose, who happened to stand a little apart, and, being wrapt up in his own melody, kept on a quavering course,

wriggling his head, ogling his book, and winding all up by a nasal solo of at least three bars duration."

In the church records of Eastham, of the date June 11th, 1764, there occurs a reference to these days and customs.

"Being Monday in Whitsun week at a legal vestry meeting for settling the churchwardens' accounts it was afterwards agreed that there be an instrument called a Bassoon bought for the use and assistance of the singers in the Parish."

Great dissension followed this decision, and for some time the parishioners appeared inclined to resist this impetus to their musical education, but at last, some months later, the entry is made showing that the Bassoon was bought for six guineas. It was played in the church, with a bass-viol and a clarionet, to lead the singing till some 80 years ago. In 1892 the Bassoon was still in existence. At West Kirby parish church the musical instruments in use up to 1807 were violin, flute, bassoon, hautboy, and violoncello In some churches what was called a "vamping" trumpet was employed to fill in *quantum sufficit*. The imagination shudders at the very thought of it! At

Shotwick the old fiddler's desk is now used as a lectern.

The use of the pulpit in religious worship dates back to great antiquity, and, though the Reformed church made much of the sermon, preaching had been in vogue from earliest times, though the scholarship exhibited in the pulpit was often of a very inferior order, for many of the mediæval priests and monks were illiterate. The Dean of Salisbury, for example, in 1220 made a searching visitation of the parishes on the prebendal estates which pertained to the Dean and Chapter, and one chaplain, being examined upon the opening words of the Mass, *Te igitur clementissime pater rogamus*, gravely suggested that the word *Te* was governed by *Pater* because the Father governed all things! Nevertheless the value of preaching and instruction from church pulpits was strongly emphasised in the religious manuals of pre-Reformation days.

But, in addition to this use of the pulpit in mediæval times, it was a place of reading of the Bede Roll—a list of names for whom the prayers of the people were asked. For the due reciting of the Bede

Roll, the parish priest usually received a gratuity of about four shillings.

The pulpit was also made the vehicle of public information, and to some extent supplied the place which newspapers occupy to-day. Thus, within a short period of Edward III's reign, instructions were forwarded to the clergy as to the line they were to take with regard to the dread felt before the battle of Crecy, the reports of a treacherous attack on Calais, the alarm as to the presence of the Spanish fleet before the battle of Winchester, and the crowning glory of Poictiers.

That Wirral pulpits played their share in such announcements is interestingly borne out in the registers of Neston parish church, where the vicar was enjoined to give warning to all whose names appeared on the muster roll to have their weapons ready in case of an attack by the Spanish Armada.

"With the Reformation," says Francis Bond, "came about a great decline in preaching. Sermons became such a rarity that the term 'Sermon Bell' was currently applied to a special bell which informed the parishioners when a sermon

was about to be delivered. In the days of Edward VI there were very few licensed preachers; eight sermons were to be preached annually in every parish church, but four of these were to attack the Papacy or to defend the Royal Supremacy. It was still worse in the following reign. So much alarm was felt lest the sermon should exalt Geneva on the one hand, or Rome on the other, that the Elizabethan Injunctions of 1559 provided that four sermons were to be preached during the year, and that homilies were to be read on the other Sundays. Preachers' licences were most sparingly granted. An Elizabethan clergy list of the whole of the diocese of Lichfield towards the end of the Queen's reign enumerates 433 beneficed clergy, whilst out of this number only 81—or less than a fifth—were licensed to preach. There can, indeed, be no doubt that there was far less preaching during Elizabeth's long reign than during any other reign from the Conqueror down to the present time."

Then came the inevitable swing of the pendulum, when sermons were not only plentiful but inordinately long, a two hours' discourse being considered by no

means too much. The time was then kept by means of an hour-glass fixed to the pulpit. Nor did the congregation necessarily complain. On the contrary Macaulay says of Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, that he was often interrupted by the deep hum of his audience : and when, after preaching out the hour-glass, he held it in his hands, the congregation clamorously encouraged him to go on till the sand had run off once more.

The mediæval pulpit was clearly intended to be a centre of attraction, for the best of sculpture and of carving was often employed in its construction, often with vivid colourings. Even the Puritan reaction gave way in this respect and, though they objected "strongly to bright colours in vestments, altar cloths, and even to painted glass, and desired to reduce the House of God to a dreary greyness, they apparently found it impossible to reduce everything to neutral tints, and gave way in the case of pulpit hangings and cushions. It was easier to do this, as the pulpit exalted preaching—the most human part of the service. Bishop Stubbs, when writing about seventeenth century pulpits, says, with satirical hum-

our, 'the cushion seems to have been an object of special devotion.' The most absurd sums were not infrequently paid for this decking of the pulpit, and matters even went so far as to make the neglect of this adornment an ecclesiastical offence."

When the sermon came to occupy a more prominent place in public estimation, the pulpit naturally grew in importance. Monstrous galleries were reared round the church, the nave was cut up like a modern cattle market into so many closed pens or pews, and the whole place was arranged for comfortable hearing rather than for devout worshipping. The people ceased to take much part in the service, except as listeners, and prayer and praise were left to the parson and the clerk. Then it was that the "Three-Decker" came into being. In the lowest of the three pulpits sat the clerk, monotonously mouthing the responses to the prayers read by the parson in the second pulpit just above his head. At the close of the duet, the latter, donning black gown and bands, ascended to the "Upper-deck" to deliver his sermon of an hour or more. "This hideous abomination in the way of ecclesiastical arrangements," says the

Rev. G. S. Tyack, "generally stood in the centre of the church, towering like Babel up to heaven, and completely shutting out the altar from sight, proclaiming itself the only feature of importance in the house of God. Happily it is now as thoroughly a thing of the past as the antiquated war ships from which, in derision, it was named; if examples of either now exist, they are curiosities only."

One remains in perfect preservation at Shotwick. It stands in the aisle against the north wall, and appears to have been in the church since 1812, for in that year there is an entry in the churchwardens' accounts "taking the old pulpit to Chester, and fetching the new Ditto Ditto." The former pulpit, prior to 1706, stood "adjoining to the corner of ye south chancel and ye south wall of ye church," so that it was "scarce visible and the words of the minister scarce audible to those who sit in the north chancel, but if the same (with the reading desk) be remov'd and plac'd near the Dormant Window in the North Wall of the Church, it will be more decent to the place, more convenient and commodious to the congregation."

Photograph by Alexander Reid

INTERIOR OF SHOTWICK CHURCH
SHOWING THREE-DECKER PULPIT AND
CHURCHWARDENS' PEW

Thus went the old churchwardens' report. A commission was therefore issued by the Bishop of Chester in 1706 to "James Hockenhull, Esq., and John Basnet, yeoman, churchwardens, with others, to remove the pulpit as well as to take down 'all such Seates or Pewes as are now irregular and ununiform, and to make them anew and uniform.'"

At Stoak church an old three-decker pulpit is still used, though so altered as to be unrecognisable, for the upper of the three portions has been detached and mounted by itself. There were also three-deckers at Burton and Eastham some sixty years ago, as well as one at West Kirby where it stood in front of the altar rails in ungainly mass. It was removed in 1788.

It is curious to note that occasionally these pulpits were *mounted on wheels.* One of these is noted by John Wesley in his Journal (Aug. 15th, 1781). He remarks that the custom was to shift the contrivance once a quarter so that all the pews faced it in turns.

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CHAPTER VIII.

OLD BIBLES AND BOOKS IN WIRRAL CHURCHES.

"That Sacred Book which long has fed our meditations."

Wordsworth.

THE oldest Bible in Wirral is at Upton church, a copy of the Genevan version, commonly known as the "Breeches Bible," because of the translation of Genesis iii. 7, the Genevan Bible reading "breeches" where the Authorised Version reads "aprons."* This rendering, however, is not peculiar to this Bible; it is to be found in the Wycliffe version, where the verse reads, "And whan yei knewen yat ya were naked ya

* NOTE. A "Breeches Bible" dated 1599 is also to be seen at the "Memorial Church," Liscard.

sewiden ye leves of a fige tre and madin brechis " ; and also in Caxton's " Golden Legend " where the line occurs, " toke figge leuis and sewed them togyder for to couere theyre membres in maner of brechis."

The Genevan Bible was the offspring of the Marian terror, when many notable Protestants fled for safety to the continent. Among the many places there which offered protection and hospitality to the English exiles, was the Lutheran city of Frankfort, but the spirit of intolerance affected even this stronghold of Protestantism, and there arose a bitter quarrel among the fugitives over the matter of the revised English prayer book of 1552. The Conforming party were prepared to abide by the ceremonial requirements of the book as it then stood, but the Nonconformists, under the leadership of John Knox, scented popery and superstition in every page and declined to accept it. Finally, in 1555, there occurred an open rupture, and the Knox faction shook off the dust of Frankfort from their feet and betook themselves to the more congenial atmosphere of Geneva, " The Mecca of the Reformed Faith." It is to these

seceding Calvinists, the source of the anti-sacramental movement which deepened eventually into Puritanism, that we owe the Genevan Bible, a version which had so wonderful a success that no fewer than 160 editions passed into circulation.

This popularity was largely due to the adoption of Roman type instead of the Black Letter, in which all English Bibles had previously been printed, and to the division of the chapters into verses, which superseded the older method of placing letters of the alphabet down the sides of the page. Apparently though, some of the sales, at least in Scotland, were enforced, J. R. Dore stating that the Privy Council passed a law "that each householder worth 300 merks of yearly rent, and all substantious yeomen and burgesses esteemed as worth £500 in land and goods, should have a Bible in the vulgar tongue, under the penalty of £10," *i.e.* double the price at which the book was authorised to be sold and four times that at which it could be bought. To enforce this enactment, searchers were appointed to go from house to house throughout Scotland, and each householder was required to produce a Bible or pay the penalty. And, as it

was found that Bibles were made to do duty for more than one house, the inquisitor was granted a warrant "to require the sicht of their Bible, gif they ony have, to be marked with their own name for eschewing of fraudful dealing in that behalf." Yet in spite of this pressure many people "incurrit the payne of the act" rather than purchase one.

The title of the Genevan Bible is as follows:—

> "The Bible | and | Holy Scriptures | conteyned in | the old and Newe | Testament | Translated accor | ding to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in divers languages | With moste profitable anno | tations vpon all the hard places, and other things of great | importance as may appear in the Epistle to the reader |
>
> Feare not, stand stil, and beholde | the saluacion of the Lord, which he wil shewe to you this day."

These "annotations" ultimately became the cause of great controversy. They were certainly very prejudiced, as might be expected in a Calvinistic publication of that age; for example Revelation ix. 3 (locusts that came out of the bottom-

less pit) is explained as meaning "false teachers, heretics, and worldly subtil prelates, with Monks, Friars, Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, Doctors, Bachelors and Masters of Arts, which forsake Christ to maintain false doctrine!" The note to II Chron. xv. 16 again has a political bias. The verse in the Authorised Version reads: "And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kedron," and to this the editors have naively added the comment "Herein he shewed that he lacked zeale for she ought to have died," that is to say, King Asa should have murdered her. It was this feeling that culminated in the execution of Charles I. The Genevan Bible contains also four pages of an almanac, with woodcuts over each month illustrating the seasons, as follows:—

"Januarie	This moneth figureth the death of the bodie.
Februarie	This moneth hedges ar closed.
Marche	Sowe barly and podware.
April	Leade the flockes to fielde.
Maye	Walke the liuing fieldes.

June	Sheare the shepe.
Julie	Make haye
Auguste	Reape Corne.
September	Time of vinedage.
October	Tille the grounde.
Nouembre	The fields make heuy chere.
Decembre	This moneth keepeth men in house."

At the end of II Maccabees is a list of proper names chiefly found in the Old Testament, from which readers are exhorted to choose names for their children. This list is headed :—

" Whereas the wickedness of time, and the blindness of the former age hathe bene suche that all things altogether bene abused and corrupted, so that the very right names of diuerse of the holie men named in the scriptures bene forgotten, and now seme strange vnto us, and the names of infants that shulde euer have some godlie aduertisements in them, and should be memorials and marks of the children of God receiued into his householde, haue bene hereby also charged and made the signes and badges of idolatrie and heathenish impietie we have now set forthe this table of ye names . . . . partly to call back the godlie from that abuse, when they shal know the true names of the godlie fathers and what they signifie, that their children nowe named after them may have testimonies by their verie names that they are within that faithful familie that in all their doings had euer God before their eyes . . ."

Then in the list are to be found such extraordinary names as the following :— Ahasueros, Artahshaste, Beraiah, Caseluhim, Dositheus, Eleadah, Elichoenai,

Gazabar, Hanameel, Jephunneh, Kerentrappuch, Mahazioth, Noadiah, Pedahel, Retrabeam, Sabteca, Tanhumeth, Vopsi, etc. Vopsi however is quite good!

The second oldest Bible in Wirral is an early edition of King James' version, which is at Backford. The origin of this version was as follows: At the Hampton Court Conference between the Church Party and the Conforming Dissenters, held January 16-18, 1604, it was decided that a new translation of the Bible should be made, and the resolution was proposed by Dr. Reynolds, the leader of the Puritan party, in which he "moved His Majesty that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those which were allowed in the reign of Henry VIII and Edward VI were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the origin." King James answered that he did not consider any English translation satisfactory, but the worst of all the versions was the Genevan, some of the notes of which were "very partial, untrue, seditious and savoured of dangerous and traitorous conceits."

The copy at Backford was printed by Robert Barker of London in 1617, and is

an early edition of King James' version in large folio, printed in Black Letter. The title is :—

> "'The Holy Bible' conteyning the Old Testament, and the New: Newly translated out of the original Tongues: and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his maiesties special Commandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Maiesties Anno Dom. 1617."

The words are printed within a woodcut (so frequently seen also in the Genevan Bible) of the twelve Apostles on the right hand, with large pictures of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John engaged in writing. On the left are the twelve tribes with their tents and armorial bearings. The Agnus Dei is below the sacred name, and the Dove above it. It has 68 pages of preliminary, the prayer book, etc., coming after the dedication and preface. There is an error in the text which is characteristic, viz., Jeremiah xviii. 3, where there is "whelles" for "wheels." Unfortunately several pages have been stolen from this copy, and for this reason it is kept in a glass case where it lies open at the title

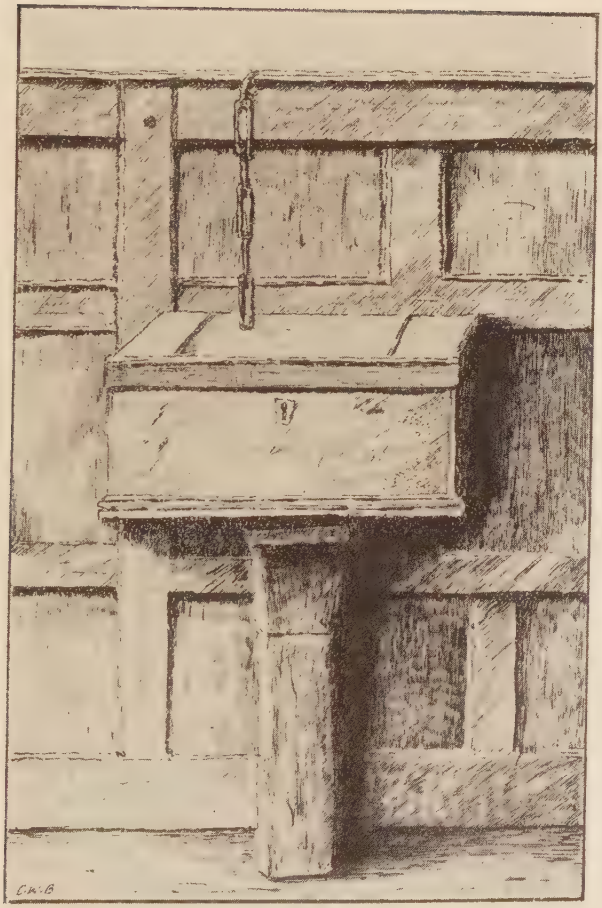
page of the New Testament, which can be read by visitors and need not therefore be repeated here. The Bible at Backford is of further interest because it is chained.

The custom of fastening books to their shelves was formerly an important feature of many church libraries. The practice appears to have become common after the injunctions given by Edward VI to the "Clergie and the Laitie," in 1547, in which they are ordered "to provide within three months after the visitacion, one boke of the whole Bible of largest volume in English, and within one twelve month after the said visitacion, the Paraphrasis of Erasmus, the same to be sette uppe in some convenient place within the churche." This injunction was repeated by Queen Elizabeth in 1659, and, although nothing was mentioned about chains, it seems probable that the churchwardens adopted this plan for the protection of their property. Later it was quite common for benefactors to leave their libraries to churches on condition that they were chained. To-day the books that remain chained are but few and are chiefly confined to the Bible, Erasmus' Paraphrase, Jewel's Apology, and to

Foxe's Book of Martyrs. The last book is at Burton, though it is now detached from the chain and desk upon which it once rested together with a Bible which has since been lost.

The desk at Burton to which these volumes were fastened stands with the remains of the old chain against the wall of the north aisle. It is of oak. These desks are now rare, for, "as printing gained ground and books obtained admission to even the humblest of homes, a chained book became an anachronism, and no wonder that the stands to which they were attached became so much useless lumber, especially as such stands rarely if ever consisted of ornamental or carved woodwork. As early as 1622, an enlightened benefactor left a number of books to be stored in the parish church of Repton, Derbyshire, provided they were not chained, but lent according to the discretion of the minister and wardens. By the close of the seventeenth century the custom of chaining books came almost to an end."

Foxe's Book of Martyrs now occupies a secure place in the vestry at Burton, where it shares company with an old Bible that



From an original Pen-drawing by the Author

BIBLE DESK AND CHAIN
BURTON

belonged to Bishop Wilson containing notes in his own hand-writing.

John Foxe was born at Boston, Lincolnshire, and was educated at Oxford, where he became a fellow of Magdalen College, remaining till 1545, when he left on account of his strong Protestant views. He was ordained a priest in 1560 and became Canon of Salisbury in 1563. He is chiefly famous as the author of the work known as Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which greatly influenced the progress of Protestantism in England, and was consequently bitterly opposed by the Roman Catholics.

The book was printed in 1562-63 by John Daye, of London. The copy at Burton has unfortunately lost its title page, but John Daye's name appears at the end of the volume. It is a first edition, printed in Black Letter, and bound in leather with brass corners. There is also the brass attachment for the chain.

The original title page read as follows :

"The Actes and Monumentes of These Latter and Perilous Dayes touching matters of the Church wherein are comprehended and discovered the great Persecution horrible Troubles that have been wrought and practised by

the Romishe Prelates speciallye in this Realme of England and Scotland from the yeare of our Lord a thousande to the time now present gathered and colected accords to the true Copies and Wrytinges certificatorie as well of the Parties themselves that Suffered, and also out of the Bishop's Registers which were the Doers thereof by John Foxe."

The last old Bible to be noted is Bishop Wilson's copy, which now rests in the vestry of Burton church. Bishop Wilson was a native of Burton where he was baptized on December 25th, 1663. In 1698 he was appointed to the vacant See of Sodor and Man. Known as "good Bishop Wilson," he was remarkable for his piety, his charity and his courage. He carried out his episcopal duties with a thoroughness unusual in his day, and he is noted as a writer of many theological works, one of which upon the Holy Eucharist is still authoritative. He also published portions of the Bible in Manx, and the Notes which appear in the Bible at Burton may have formed part of the original manuscript of that celebrated work.

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P. F. A. MORRELL : Notes on Burton Parish Registers.

J. PATERSON SMYTHE : How we got our Bible.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ALTAR IN WIRRAL OLD CHURCHES.

"L'autel chretien est une table et un tombeau."

Fleury.

FROM Pagan times the altar has ever been regarded as the most essential feature in religious worship, and so true is this of the Christian church that it has been affirmed that the church fabric itself is really an accessory of the altar, and in its primary function but a shelter for it. Yet the early Christians would appear not to have used an altar, but to have gathered round a table when they celebrated the "Lord's Supper," for it is recorded by tradition that, when St. Peter arrived in Rome, he celebrated his first Communion at a three-legged table, brought from the

dining-room of the palace, and it is a fact that there are several representations in the catacombs of a table of this kind. For a considerable time indeed the early Christians continued to receive the Eucharist at a wooden table, and in the wooden altar of the Greek church to-day we have the Eastern survival of this custom, a survival symbolised by the communion table of the Free Churches at the present time, and by the old communion tables used as altars in certain Anglican churches.

But the present Anglican form of altar is not wholly based upon the "Lord's Table" of the early Church. It will be recalled that the Romans who persecuted the first Christians did not carry that persecution to the point of violation of the bodies of the dead, and the burial places of converts were not molested. Thus there arose the practice of holding secret religious meetings in the catacombs where safety was more or less ensured, and at these meetings the sarcophagus of some martyred saint formed a convenient table for the celebration of Holy Communion. Says Francis Bond, "Just as the wooden table was connected in loving memory by the early Christians with many genera-

tions of good Christian people living peaceably in their habitations, so the stone altar called to mind hurried, secret, perilous communions of Christians of Rome down in the noisome gloom of the catacombs, lit only by flickering lamp or torch, before the altar-tomb of him whose fate might at any time be theirs." Thus it was that the author of the great "Histoire Ecclesiastique" said that the Christian altar was both a table and a tomb.

From about the fourth century to the period of the Reformation stone altars definitely replaced the first wooden tables, but in the reign of Edward VI the latter were ordered to be restored, and in 1550 the council ordered Ridley, Bishop of London, and other bishops "to cause to be taken down all the altars in every church and chapel, and instead of them a table to be set up in some convenient part of the chancel, within every such church or chapel." But the order was certainly not carried out everywhere, for in the Injunctions issued by Queen Elizabeth in 1559 it is definitely stated that "in some other places the altars be not yet removed." Before then, however, a great number of altars had already perished; for instance,

in Lincolnshire, the returns to Edward VI's commissioners report that one altar slab was converted into a kitchen sink, another into a fireback, another into a cistern-bottom, a fourth into a hearth-stone, a fifth into a bridge over a brook, another into a stile in the churchyard, while a seventh was converted by a parson into a pair of steps for a staircase. At Backford there is an oak chest the lid of which was once the " Mensa " of an altar.

At any rate the wooden communion table became a feature of the Reformed Church, and with this change and the violent reaction of that period against high sacramental views, there grew up the practice of sitting at the communion table in domestic fashion, many tables being provided with leaves or other methods of extension, so that a large or small gathering could be accommodated. Gradually, however, this came to be regarded as showing a lack of reverent devotion, and kneeling desks were interposed between the seats and the table, while communicants, who were not able to find a place thereat, knelt in the chancel, though not at any altar rails. Thus Bishop Montague in 1639 published the following

directions: "That the communicants, being entered (into the chancel), shall be disposed of orderly in their several ranks, leaving sufficient room for the priest or minister to go between them, by whom they were to be communicated one rank after another, until they had all of them received." The table, it is to be noted, did not stand as now against the east wall of the chancel, but was turned and placed in the middle of the choir, or even the nave, so as to stand east and west. Probably it remained against the south wall when not in use.

With the accession of Laud to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633, what were then the "High Church" views were promoted with vigour. Laud directed that the communion table in all churches and chapels should occupy the same position as the ancient altar, and he further insisted that it should be railed in. This stopped the practice of placing the table in the nave for Holy Communion, and had the further advantage, which must read strangely to us now, of keeping dogs out, for the people were accustomed to bring these animals into church with them.

But Laud's reforms savoured too much of Papacy in the eyes of the Protestant Party, and in 1643 he was tried for endeavouring to "alter the Protestant religion into Popery," in order to "subvert the laws of the kingdom;" and for these alleged crimes he was beheaded.

In 1643, Parliament was supreme, and passed an Act "for the utter demolishing, removing, and taking away of all monuments of superstition and idolatry," and doubtless many altar rails were then destroyed. Where, however, the Elizabethan practice of moving the communion table backward and forward to the nave was retained, there could not have been rails of any kind.

But, whatever the reason, many churches were apparently without rails as late as 1704. The tendency, however, to put them up increased after the Restoration in 1660, and, when this was done, they were placed in a straight row in front of the sanctuary as to-day, and not around it as in the Laudian or Puritan fashion. To this period of history belong the fine Jacobean altar rails at Burton and Stoak, the oldest in Wirral.

The altars of the primitive church had

no reredos, and its appearance dates only from the time when episcopal seats and choir stalls were established in front of the altars. Towards the end of the eleventh century the altar was not pushed back against the east wall, but there was erected upon it a movable reredos. Nevertheless it would appear to have been the custom for the early Christians to paint a cross or other symbol behind the altar, and the modern reredos is undoubtedly a development of this tradition. The term to-day, however, is used loosely and may mean either the embroidered hangings at the back of the altar, or the actual altar back, or even the step which is occasionally found at the back of the altar slab.

At first, in great cathedrals, only the minor altars were fitted with a reredos, but in our parish churches the difficulties which attended the fixing of one to the High Altar did not exist; though, if the east window were built sufficiently low, the stained glass formed a natural reredos. This is the case, for example, at Woodchurch. Many archæologists consider that this mode was preferred to all others and, after that, the most popular method was to suspend a hanging

of some textile fabric at the back of the altar from hooks in the east wall. During the Middle Ages this was changed with every change of the sacerdotal vestments, so as to conform to the colour requirements of the ecclesiastical seasons. In the XIVth and XVth centuries the sculptured reredos became very common, a popularity stimulated by the introduction of alabaster, which was first worked near Chellaston in Derbyshire, and this beautiful stone is still a favourite and can be seen very finely carved in the modern reredos in Thurstaston church. In Bidston Parish church there is a reredos of mosaic executed by an Italian artist named Salviati, and representing Da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper." Mosaic has been for centuries a favourite medium for ecclesiastical decoration, due not only to its elasticity and beauty, but to its durability, for mosaic is practically imperishable.

In ancient times nothing was placed on the altar but the altar cloths and the sacred vessels containing the elements of the Eucharist. "A feeling of reverence," says Martene, "permitted not the presence of anything on the altar except

the things used in the Holy Oblation." Hence there were no candlesticks on the altar, nor any images or pictures. Even in the IXth century we find Leo IV limiting the objects, which might lawfully be placed on the altar, to the shrine containing relics, or perhaps the codex of the gospels, and the "pyx" or box in which the Host was reserved for the viaticum of the sick. Not even was a cross placed thereon for the first eight centuries unless during Celebrations. Flowers, however, appear to have been used as early as the VIth century.

The burning of lights upon or near the altar is a custom taken over, like so many other ecclesiastical acts, from Pagan religion, and used in Christian worship with a changed symbolism. The practice would appear to have begun not earlier than the IVth century, an early reference to it occurring in the records of one of the Spanish ecclesiastical councils, where it is decreed that "wax candles be not kindled in a cemetery during the day, for the spirits of the saints ought not to be disquieted." In the time of Saint Jerome we first hear of lights being used for church decoration on festivals, "the

bright altars crowned with lamps thickly set," and from this point the transition to ceremonial use was but a step.

Moreover, the fact that the early persecutions often compelled the Christians to celebrate the Lord's Supper in secret, at all hours of the night and in caves and catacombs, made an artificial light essential, and the necessary lights of one age became the ceremonial lights of the next. So in the VIIth and VIIIth centuries we find the bishops preceded by acolytes bearing candles before the reading of the gospel, but they were extinguished for the Celebration, a reminiscence of the days of danger. When extinguished, they were placed behind the altar, a practice which naturally paved the way for altar lights.

In the chancel of Lower Bebington church and in the Lady Chapel are to be seen several stone brackets built into the walls. These were for lamps. They were used up to the time of the suppression of the chantries in the reign of Edward VI, a small endowment for keeping a lamp burning before the altar being confiscated by the crown at the same time.

These lights originated about the VIth century, history supplying such incidents as the story of a hermit of that period, who, when about to visit any holy place, used to set a candle before the picture of the Blessed Virgin, trusting to her to keep it burning until he returned. In 715 Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, writing to another bishop says :— "Let it not scandalize some that lights are before the sacred images, and sweet perfumes. For such rites have been devised to their honour . . . For the visible lights are a symbol of immaterial and divine light, and the burning of sweet spices of the pure and perfect inspiration and fulness of the Holy Ghost." In 787 the second council of Nicaea gave its sanction to the practice, already popular, by a decree that "an offering of incense and lights should be made in honour of the icons of Christ, of angels, of the Blessed Virgin, and other saints."

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CHAPTER X.

OLD PLATE IN WIRRAL CHURCHES.

"The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with His own,

. . . . . .

Arimathaean Joseph, journeying brought
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.
And there awhile it bode; and if a man
Could touch or see it, he was heal'd at once,
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times
Grew to such evil that the holy cup
Was caught away to heaven and disappeared."

From Tennyson's "The Holy Grail."

THE most beautiful and essential member of any collection of church plate is the Chalice, the cup in which the wine is consecrated at the celebration of Holy Communion, and from which the communicants drink. At first these cups were those used in every day domestic life, and probably no special sanctity was accorded them. That used by our Lord at the Last Supper was, in all likelihood, a small bowl, possibly of brass, without handles, and held from below when drinking, poised on the tips of three fingers in the way shown on the ancient sculptures.

The very earliest chalices seem to have been made of wood, for Pope Zephyrinus (A.D. 197-217) issued an edict forbidding its use and in favour of glass, and the employment of wood was again declared illegal by several provincial councils of the VIIIth and IXth centuries. In 847-855 both wood and glass were prohibited though the latter continued in popular use to a much later date. Pewter appears to have superseded glass, for we are told of St. Benedict of Aniane (*circa.* 821) that the vessels of his church were at first of wood, then of glass, and that at last he ascended to pewter. Bronze was used in

Ireland, a very exceptional metal. It is said that the Irish monks refused silver because of the tradition that St. Columbanus was accustomed to use bronze in memory of the bronze nails with which our Lord was nailed to the cross.

At what period in the Church's growth the form of the chalice became definitely ecclesiastical is not known. The ultimate exclusive use of the word "chalice" to denote the Eucharistic cup has led to the supposition that the classical form was that specifically called "calix," a cup with a shallow bowl, two handles and a foot, and of large capacity on account of the number of communicants. The double handles were of use for passing the vessel round like a loving cup. Then the first alteration was the omission of the handles, so that the chalice took the form of a large hemispherical bowl, with a round foot and a knob on the stem for security in holding it. At this stage in its evolution it appears to have been the custom for the priest to hold the chalice while the communicants sucked the wine through a silver tube. In the XIIth century the chalice was marked with a cross to show which side the priest held towards himself.

The foot of the chalice was at first circular, but as the custom developed of laying the chalice on its side on the paten to drain at the ablutions during Mass, the circular base disappeared in favour of hexagonal feet.

English communion plate to-day usually consists of the chalice, the paten, and the flagon, but in pre-Reformation times the articles were more numerous and included, in addition, cruets for wine and water, spoons, pyxes or ciboria, paxbredes and chrismatories. The pre-Reformation vessels were small because the wine was consumed only by the celebrant, and as water was always mixed with the wine, the cruets were used in pairs, one being labelled A (Aqua) for the water, and the other V (Vinum) for the wine. These cruets were superseded by flagons after the reign of Edward VI. Spoons were used for adjusting the quantity of wine used at Mass and for the removal of foreign bodies such as insects, pieces of cork, etc., that might find their way into the wine. The pyxes or ciboria were boxes for the reservation of the Eucharist. The paxbrede or osculatorium was a tablet used in the Middle Ages as an object to be

kissed at the altar in substitution for the fraternal kiss of peace. It was introduced into England about 1250.

In the first prayer book of Edward VI the rubric directs that, before the communion takes place, the priest shall say :— "The peace of the Lord be always with you," to which the clerks respond :— "And with thy Spirite." It was at this point the priest kissed the Pax, and when he had done so it was passed round the congregation for each one to kiss, this act having reference to the simple precept of the early Christians "Salute one another with an holy kiss." Thus by the medium of the Pax the priest and the congregation gave one another the holy kiss of peace. The use of the Pax was retained at the beginning of the Reformation in England, and enforced by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of Edward VI in the following terms :— "The clerk shall bring down the Paxe, and standing without the church door, shall say loudly to the people, 'This is a token of joyful peace which is between God and men's conscience ; Christ alone is the peace-maker, which straightly commands peace between brother and brother.

And as long as ye use these ceremonies so long shall ye use these significations.' "

The disuse of the Pax in the English church, and (except in special cases) in the Roman Catholic church, is said to be due to the jealousies which arose among individuals as to who was to have it first to kiss, a case actually being reported of a communicant breaking it in pieces over the clerk's head, causing streams of blood to flow, this in confirmation of a threat on the previous Sunday when the aggressor had declared :— " Clarke, if thou hereafter givest not me the Pax first, I shall breke it on thy head ! "

Chrismatories were boxes or caskets containing three covered pots for holding the three varieties of anointing oil, viz., the Sanctum Chrisma (Holy Cream), the oleum Infirmorium (for the last unction to the sick), and the oleum Catechumenorium for anointing at Baptism.

Patens were at first of very great size, sometimes weighing as much as twenty and thirty pounds. They were in use from the earliest times for the purpose of administering the Bread, and they show the same variety in material as has been noted in the case of the chalice. The

present form of paten, which serves the double purpose of a plate and a cover for the chalice, arose from the necessity of protecting the cup from poisoning. This subject is developed in dealing with the Credence.

Pre-Reformation plate is very scarce to-day, as the greater part was confiscated in the reign of Edward VI, "because the king had neede of a masse of mooney," and this confiscation was followed by the destruction of almost every object connected with the ritual of the church on which there was anything of the nature of a graven image. A short respite from this iconoclasm occurred in the reign of Mary, but the destruction was continued in the Elizabethan period, chalices particularly being destroyed, because they were too small for the use of the laity from whom the cup was withheld in the pre-Reformation church. Thus in the reign of Edward VI, commissioners were appointed to visit each county and enquire whether there remained in the churches, "any images, offerings, candlesticks, shrines, coverings of shrines, or any other monument of idolatry, superstition and hypocrisy" and if so, to destroy them.

Photograph by the Author

ELIZABETHAN CHALICE
WITH PATEN COVER
STOAK

It was in this same reign that the cup was restored to the laity.

At the end of Edward's reign the plate possessed by each church consisted simply of one silver chalice and a paten, the latter also serving as a cover for the cup. These vessels, like those of the early church, were largely drawn from domestic sources, any suitable cup being used, so that the patterns of these early post-Reformation chalices are of the greatest possible variety. Even surgeons' bleeding bowls were sometimes used, perhaps with symbolic intent. Towards the end of the reign of Charles I a feeble attempt was made to standardise the chalice, but this was not really effected on any scale until the early years of Queen Victoria, when the Gothic revival began. From that time chalices have been made more or less on the pre-Reformation model, though very much larger as befitted the use by the laity.

With the restoration of the cup to the general congregation, there naturally arose the need for a large vessel to contain the wine which would be consumed where there were many people partaking of Holy Communion, and, just as domestic vessels were at first used for the chalices,

so ordinary tankards of any material were employed for this secondary purpose. But in 1603 the canonical law required that the wine be brought to the communion table in a "clean and sweet standing pot or stoup of pewter, if not of purer metal." Many of the old flagons that are used now were employed not only for communion wine but also for "church-ales" and for serving hot spiced drinks at funerals, as well as for sundry local festivities.

Of such type is the old Cromwellian tankard at Shotwick. It is dated 1685; but in this connection it must be remembered that dates on church plate are often misleading, the date sometimes referring not to the year of manufacture, but to the date of the gift of the plate to the church. Many articles of church plate, therefore, are far older than their inscriptions. In some cases old plate has been renovated. This has occurred at Heswall, where there is a Jacobean chalice with the inscription:

> "This was made new and enlarged at the expense of Mrs. Glegg of Gayton 1739."

It was probably the old chalice that had been in use in the church for centuries.

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

OLD PEWTER TANKARD
SHOTWICK CHURCH

About the same time this family presented the silver paten to Heswall church. It is inscribed :

> "The gift of William Glegg Esq. to the Parish of Heswall in Cheshire 1740."

There is also a flagon :

> "The gift of Phoebe wife of Richard Davenport of Calvary Esq. to the Parishioners of Heswall in the County of Cheshire in the year of our Redemption 1736."

But the treasure of Heswall church is the beautiful old Gothic chalice, a photograph of which is reproduced in these pages. Its date is unknown. It bears the inscription :

> "In dear memory of my Godchild Elsie Brocklebank, I, Edward Rae, have given this old Danish Chalice to the Chapel of St. Peter at Heswall, built by her Father and Mother; 29th November 1893."

At Burton the old plate is lost, tradition stating that it lies buried somewhere in the churchyard, a common effort of concealment in the iconoclastic days of the Reformation. The present plate is late

XVIIIth century and was the gift of Richard Congreve in 1809.

According to the inventory of church goods in Wirral in the reign of Edward VI, 1549-1550, Shotwycke "had one chales," but, unfortunately, it seems to have been lost or stolen in the Civil War, for on the 22nd December, 1665, the churchwardens were presented in the ecclesiastical court, "because there were no vessels for the Communion." The present chalice is regarded as unique. It is $5\frac{5}{8}$ inches in height, the bowl being $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter at the top and bearing the inscription :

"John Hale William Briscoe
Churchwardens of the Parish of
Shotwick 1685."

The pewter flagon has the same inscription as the chalice.

Another beautiful survival in Wirral is the Elizabethan chalice at Stoak, now too frail to be used, but treasured at the time of writing in the local bank. Both these chalices are pictured in these pages. At Stoak, too, is an old silver paten presented to the church in 1772 by John Grace of Whitby.

At Backford the plate in use is modern,

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

THE SHOTWICK CHALICE

but the church also possesses two Georgian chalices of heavy goblet pattern.

At Bebington there are two beautiful old chalices of nearly identical design, though one is very much larger than the other. The bigger of the two bears the date 1737, and the inscription :—

"John Oxten William Stanley
Churchwardens."

The smaller is believed to be the older. It bears no date or names, but on the bowl is engraved the monogram I.H.S. within a radiating sun.

At Woodchurch is a fine old silver chalice with the inscription round the rim :

"The Communion Cup of Woodchurche,
William Ball Thomas Couentrie
Churchwardens 1625."

Lastly in the Parish of Overchurch, usually known as Upton, there is in the present church the chalice that came from the old Norman building that stood near the Upton Moreton road, an account of which has already been given in the "Beauty and Interest of Wirral." This cup was presented apparently by the second son of Peter Bold of Upton, who

died October 25th, 1605. It bears upon the bowl the coat of arms borne by the Bold family and an inscription :

> "Carolus Bold, filius Petri Bold de Upton armigere dedit hunc calicem ecclesie ibidem eodem tempore dedit illis Bibliam 1618."

Accompanying the chalice is a small paten with the letters C.B. engraved upon the base with a graceful ropework pattern.

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CHAPTER XI.

CHANCEL RELICS IN WIRRAL PARISH CHURCHES.

" Habeamus ergo curam
Circa Christi sepulchuram
Vigilando noctibus;
Ut, cum secum vigilamus,
In aeterno valeamus
Auspiciis celestibus."

An Ancient Hymn.

THE survivals of ancient times belonging to the chancels of the old parish churches of Wirral include the Easter Sepulchre, the Piscina, the Credence, the Aumbry and the Sedilia. The first of these is found in at least one of our churches, namely Neston, where a small example was lying recently as a detached stone by the font, though the original site of the masonry must have been the chan-

cel. Three forms of the Easter Sepulchre seem to have been in use in mediæval days, of which the most common was a temporary structure of wood. These would naturally suffer easy and complete destruction at the time of the Reformation. A second type was an altar tomb, and the third, the one surviving to-day in Wirral, a special structure of masonry built with a flat slab and a low arch, in imitation of the ledge on which the body is laid in a Hebrew rock-hewn tomb.

The ceremonies of the Easter Sepulchre go back to the VIIIth century and continue up to the time of the Reformation and even a little later, for they were revived under Queen Mary, though finally suppressed in the reign of Elizabeth. The ritual attaching to the Sepulchre was elaborate, the essential act being the conveyance of the cross thereto and the laying of it in the Sepulchre with great devotion. Upon the cross was placed the figure of our Lord and upon His breast again the Sacrament of the altar. Lights were then set up, the watching of which was a very solemn event. It is thus described by the Rev. J. Charles Cox, LL.D., F.S.A., "The perpetual lamp before the Sacra-

ment was taken down and affixed to a stand (often of considerable magnitude and beauty) in front of the Sepulchre. Other lights were frequently kindled at the same place, and the Sepulchre was solemnly watched from the time of its erection until the dawn of Easter, when the Host was placed upon or over the altar. This watching of the Sepulchre was a paid service usually done by two men, probably serving in watches alternately, and entries for their payment occur in almost every known churchwarden's book of pre-Reformation date. This watching had its utilitarian advantage as well as its symbolic signification, for it became customary to offer a great number of tapers to be burnt before the Sepulchre, so that it would be necessary to have someone on the spot night and day, for fear of fire, and to see to the frequent extinguishing or renewal of these smaller lights.

On Easter Eve the perpetual light that had been removed to the front of the Sepulchre, and all other lights there, or that might perchance happen to be anywhere else in the church, were solemnly extinguished. The hallowed or holy fire was then kindled in the church porch by

means of a crystal or burning glass, if the sun was bright, and, if not, by a new flint and steel. This fire was blessed by the priest, and from it was first kindled the great Paschal Candle, and afterwards the perpetual lamp, and other lamps or candles in the church according as light was required. The devout had let their hearth fires die out at home, and hastened to the church to obtain fresh light from the hallowed fire for their renewal.

The immense size of the Paschal Candle has often been explained; in some of our cathedral and abbey churches it was simply colossal, the one for the abbey church of Westminster weighing 300 lbs. Fifteen pounds was a usual weight for one of our smaller English country parish churches.

This great taper, which was placed close to the altar, was always burnt in English churches throughout the octave of Easter, at matins, mass and vespers, and sometimes it appears to have kept alight continuously, and down to Holy Thursday. At the same time that the Paschal candle was made, the font taper was usually constructed. It was solemnly conveyed down the church at Easter, and seems to

have been placed in a locker by the font, to be ready for ceremonial use at baptisms throughout the year."

In addition to this solemn ritual there was also performed a "Resurrection Play," an account of which is given by Bishop Trollope as follows:—

"Three canon deacons, robed in dalmatics and amices, having on their heads women's attire, carrying a little vessel, come through the middle of the choir, and hurrying with downcast looks towards the Sepulchre, together say, 'Who shall roll away this stone for us?'

This over, a boy dressed in white, like an angel, and holding a wand in his hand, says before the altar, 'Whom seek ye in the sepulchre?' Then the Marys answer, 'The crucified Jesus of Nazareth.' Then says the angel, 'He is not here, for He is risen'; showing the place with his finger. This done, the angel departs very quickly, and two priests in tunics, from the higher seat, sitting within the sepulchre, say, 'Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?' The third woman answers thus, 'Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell us.' Then says the woman, showing the cross, 'Because they have taken away

my Lord.' Then the two seated priests say, 'Whom seek ye women?' Then the Marys kiss the spot and afterwards go forth from the sepulchre.

In the meantime a priest canon, representing the Lord, in alb and stole, holding a cross, meeting them at the left corner of the altar says, 'Mary,' which as soon as she has heard, she falls quickly at His feet, and with a loud voice says, 'Rabboni.' Then the priest, restraining her, says, 'Touch me not.' This over the priest appears again at the right hand corner of the altar, and says to those passing across before the altar, 'Hail, fear not.' This done he hides himself; and the women hearing this, gladly bow before the altar turned toward the choir, and sing the verse, 'Hallelujah; the Lord hath risen, Hallelujah.' This done the archbishop or priest before the altar with the thurible says aloud, 'We praise Thee, O Lord.' And thus the office is finished."

The Piscina is a drain built in the south wall of the chancel, so that the water used for various ablutions at the altar passes through the wall or the floor into consecrated ground. It was styled indifferently

"piscina," "lavacrum," "sacrarium" or "lavatory." It was not intended for the washing of hands, for that was usually done by the celebrant in the vestry before the service, but for the sacramental vessels.

At the altar the simplest form of the ablutions was the pouring of water over the fingers of the celebrant, using two bowls, and this water was afterwards deemed particularly efficacious as a medicine for fever. In the Pontifical Mass four sets of ablutions were performed. Even then it is by no means certain that the piscina was used, but rather that it was reserved for the chalice which was always rinsed at the altar with wine and afterwards washed at the piscina with water. Pope Leo IV, about 850, directed that a place was to be provived near the altar for the disposal of the water used for the ablution of the vessels and for the priest's hands after Mass. In the XIIIth century the preliminary washing of the priest's hands before the canon of the Mass was enjoined, and hence came about the two drains and basins, side by side. But in the XIVth century the custom became general of the celebrant

drinking the ablution ; hence the reversion to the single drain.

In old Wirral churches several piscinas are seen to-day, the most perfect example existing at West Kirby where the bowl is beautifully made of red marble, pierced in the centre for the drain. At Backford there is also one in the chancel, but the bowl has been replaced by a stone ledge, on which stands a small reading desk. At Bebington there are two piscinas, one in the south wall of the chancel covered by a four-centred moulded arch, and another at the east end of the south aisle. At Woodchurch one stands in the south aisle wall. The presence of these niches is proof that altars at one time stood near them.

" The low Latin term ' credentia,' " says Francis Bond, " and the English ' credence ' were originally applied to a side table or sideboard, on which vessels and dishes were placed ready for being served at table. Thus Jewell, in 1611 says : ' While the Pope is sitting at the table, the noblest man within the Court shall be brought to the Pope's ' credence ' to give him water.' Ecclesiologically it signifies the small side table or the shelf

on which the Eucharistic elements are placed previous to consecration. Thus Prynne in 1646 says: 'Lo here in this place and chapel you have a credentia or side table.' The derivation of the word is clearly from the Latin 'credere.' But it is a long cry from the Latin 'credere'—to trust or believe to 'credentia'—a side table. The link is to be found in the precautions that used to be taken in order that a man might *trust* his meat and drink at table, and not only at table, but at the altar too. For not even the wine in the chalice was always safe. Bower says that in 1055 a sub-deacon put poison into the chalice while Pope Victor II celebrated Mass, and that he was only saved, because, by a miracle, he was unable to lift up the chalice. Nor has it been always safe in modern times. In 1877 the Archbishop of Quito is said to have been poisoned by strychnine, and there was another case in France in 1879, where many persons suffered from arsenic mingled with the sacred wafer by a confectioner.

"In the Pontifical of Pope Leo IV, who died in 1522, those who tested the elements are called 'credentiarii.'

Martene says that he had himself witnessed the same rite in the church of St. Dennis, when a Bishop celebrated, in the solemn anniversaries of the Kings of France. To this day at Pontifical Mass at St. Peter, tables are placed in the presbytery, and the wine and water are first tested by the Pope's butler, and again by the principal taster, a Bishop, with his face turned towards the Pope.

"Therefore, both in the hall and in the church, it was desirable to have a tester or taster, or, as he is called in Italian, a 'credenziere.' This credenzer tasted the food and drink placed on a side table on the dais of the hall; and a side table similarly placed in the chancel of the church was also called a 'credence,' and was used for similar purposes. That this is the process by which the meaning of 'credentia' has developed from 'trust' to 'side table' is clear from the words of J. Russell, who writing in 1460 says: 'Credence is used, and tastynge for drede of poseynge.'"

An old credence ledge is to be seen at Burton built into the chancel wall. Frequently a slab was placed over the piscina, for the architecture of these niches was

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

CHANCEL CHAIR
Made from the original Jacobean altar rails
WITH AUMBRY
BACKFORD CHURCH

often identical. Nor can the absence of a drain be accepted as proof of a credence, for some piscina niches were supplied with basins placed upon the stone ledge.

An Aumbry was a cupboard in the wall near the altar, and was used for various purposes. One of these was the reservation of the Sacrament, according to the recommendation "Upon the right hande of the highe aultar, there should be an amorie either cut into the wall or framed upon it, in the whiche thei would have the sacrement of the Lorde's Bodye; the Holy Oyle for the sicke and Chrismatorie, alwai to be locked."

The Aumbry was also a convenient place for the priests' vestments, for saintly relics, or, in later times, for parish registers and accounts. The word is derived from the Latin "armarium" meaning a cupboard or chest. Only one survival is seen in Wirral to-day, viz., at Backford, where there is a small recess at the west end of the south chancel and evident signs of the place where hinges were affixed for the door. It was not customary to ornament aumbries, which

seems curious seeing that they sometimes contained the Reserved Elements.

The Sedilia, the plural of "sedile," were seats placed on the south or "Epistle side" of the altar for the celebrant and others while certain portions of the Mass were being sung by the choir. Generally there were three and they were reserved for the celebrant, the deacon and the subdeacon, though at West Kirby there appear only to have been two. In Shotwick vestry, in the south wall, is a plain rectangular recess which is considered to have been a single sedile, which is more uncommon still. Triple sedilia are seen in several of the Wirral old churches.

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CHAPTER XII.

OLD WOOD-CARVINGS IN WIRRAL CHURCHES.

" It is not less the boast of some styles that they can bear ornament, than of others that they can do without it; but we do not often enough reflect that those very styles, of so haughty simplicity, owe part of their pleasureableness to contrast, and would be wearisome if universal. They are but the rests and monotones of the art; it is to its far happier, far higher, exaltation that we owe these fair fronts of variegated mosaic, charged with wild fancies and dark hosts of imagery, thicker and quainter than ever filled the depth of midsummer dream; those vaulted gates, trellised with close leaves; those window labyrinths of twisted tracery and starry light; those misty masses of multitudinous pinnacle and diademed tower; the only witnesses, perhaps, that remain to us of the faith and fear of nations."

Ruskin.

WITHIN the chancel of most old parish churches, and Wirral is no exception, there are generally to be found seats or stalls exhibiting a considerable richness and beauty in their wood-carvings, and the question naturally arises for whom were these elaborate seats made and who sat in them.

There were three places of honour in the old chancels, and in each case that place was to the right, in accordance with Psalm cx. 1, "Sit thou on my right hand," and because the Creed records that the Son "sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

Thus the order of precedence was first the right hand, or north side of the altar; second the seat to the right on the south side of the entrance to the chancel through the choir doorway; and third the extreme right to the east or nearest the altar of the south row of stalls. In the sanctuary, the Lord Christ was conceived to be in real, corporeal presence, face to face with His people, His right hand to the north, His left hand to the south. In the sanctuary, therefore, within the altar rails, the place of honour was on the north, and to this day when a Bishop visits a parish church his

chair is placed north of the altar. When a Bishop is not present, the Incumbent of the parish has the right to occupy this seat. That at Backford is illustrated in these pages. It was made from the old altar rails which were in the church 300 years ago. Other sanctuary chairs deserving of special notice are at Lower Bebington and at Burton.

The most important seats in the chancel apart from those in the Sanctuary are the stalls, reserved originally for the clergy, the laity being rigorously excluded. In a council about 683, however, exception was made in favour of the Roman Emperor, though St. Ambrose gained great applause for denying this privilege to Theodosius. But it was a perilous thing to exclude emperors, and what had to be conceded to them was naturally claimed by princes, and what in turn was conceded to princes was promptly claimed by nobles. Thus in Scotland in 1225 an episcopal order allowed king and nobles to stand or sit in the chancel. In 1240 in the diocese of Worcester this permission was extended to lay patrons, and from that time onwards more and more concessions were made, until at last any good

churchman was permitted to sit in the chancel.

The next step was the admission of women! Tradition and usage made this a more difficult matter, for as early as 367 A.D. the Council of Laodicea had passed a canon that women ought not to come near the altar or enter the sanctuary where the altar stood, and the rule held good with but few exceptions for many centuries. Thus in 1625, Charles I of England wrote, "In my own particular opinion I do not think . . . that women should be allowed to sit in the chancel," and traces of this feeling survive even to-day.

But, if certain stalls were reserved for the people of consequence, the most important function which they came to fulfil was the accommodation of a surpliced choir. Not every parish church, however, could afford the elaborately carved stalls granted for the use of patrons or clergy, and therefore many of the choir members had to sit on forms. At the time of writing there is an old oak form and railing in the garden of the West Kirby parish church, which may have fulfilled some such function as this. The special stalls

1.

Photographs by W. H. Tomkinson

2.

1. CHANCEL CHAIR, BEBINGTON
2. MISERICORDS, BEBINGTON

which remain at Lower Bebington are reminiscent of monastic days. They date from the first half of the xvth century, though they have suffered a certain amount of reconstruction, the capping being modern. These three stalls belong to the class known as "misericords."

The history of misericords is a very interesting one. In the primitive churches the chief posture permissible during the services was that of standing, and at prayer they stood with uplifted hands. Even when the custom of kneeling at prayer was introduced, sitting was forbidden in church. But this practice bore hardly upon the old and enfeebled. A monk in mediæval times spent a great part of each day in worship. Seven offices had to be recited daily: Matins with Lauds, Prime, Tierce, Sect, Nones, Vespers, and Compline; and, in addition to these, there was at any monastic cathedral or collegiate church the celebration of High Mass, at which the whole community had to be present. Especially did the *Sanguinati* find the task of standing so long beyond their strength. These were monks who had recently had their blood let, a routine monastic discipline. So some relaxation

of this severity became necessary, and "leaning staffs" or "reclinatoria" were introduced. Such are still used in the Eastern church, where the services are very long. (The present author once stood through an entire service, which lasted from 9-30 p.m. to 2 o'clock in the morning).

Yet strict disciplinarians, such as St. Benedict, condemned these concessions, and required that the reclinatoria should be laid aside, at any rate during the reading of the Gospel. Then a later indulgence permitted the seats to be made so that they could be hinged back, very much in the manner of our modern theatre stalls, while on the under side were fixed small ledges which would give some support to the clergy as they stood in their stalls, and yet favour the erect posture. This concession was called a "Misericordia" or "Act of Mercy," and the seats became known as "misericords" or "indulgence seats." And, because these misericords came into contact with the least dignified part of the human body, the subjects carved upon them were rarely sacred. For the most part these carvings are pictures of the daily life and thought

From an original Pen-drawing by the Author

PERPENDICULAR STALL END
WITH PELICAN HEAD
WOODCHURCH

of the common people. Not a few are satirical.

Of the three misericords in the chancel of Bebington church, one represents a dolphin, and a second a pelican feeding her young. Both subjects are very common in this connection. The dolphin is a figure taken from Greek mythology. It was spoken of as "the most royal of those that swim." Its function was that of bearing the soul across the sea of death to the island of the blest.

The pelican symbol has a particular interesting history, based on the natural fact, that when the bird plumes her feathers, a crimson spot appears upon her beak. This being presumed to be blood, gave rise to the belief that the female fed her young with her blood; and later to the idea that by her blood she could restore them to life after they had died. Thus St. Augustine, in his Commentary on Psalm cii. 6, "I am like a pelican in the wilderness," says, "The males of these birds are wont to kill their young by blows of their beaks and then to bewail their death for three days. At length, however, the female inflicts a severe wound on herself, and letting her blood flow over the dead young ones,

brings them to life again." And so it came about that "the pelican in her piety" came to symbolise Christ's Passion, since from His side flowed the blood which redeemed from death the children of men. Thus a hymn of St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of our Lord as a Pelican :

"*Pie Pelican, Jesu Domine*
Me immundum munda : Tuo Sanguine."

Dante, too, calls Christ "Nostro Pelicano."

Animals, fishes, reptiles, and birds have for centuries had a special place in the emblematic significance, and a complete system exists in an ancient work called the "Physiologus" or "Naturalist." It was compiled by an Alexandrian Greek from a great variety of sources, and doubtless embodied much of the priestly wisdom and esoteric science of ancient Egypt. The early Christian apologists seem to have been extraordinarily fond of this kind of literature, which served their purpose as an application of the supposed facts of natural history to the illustration and enforcement of moral precepts and theological dogmas. The book went through many editions and emendations, and became extremely popular in the

Middle Ages, so that probably no book except the Bible has ever been so widely diffused. It has been translated into nearly all the principal languages from the year A.D. 496 to the present time, and allusions to it are found in sermons and sacred songs, in devotional works and doctrinal treatises, and in secular and erotic poetry, as well as in the wood carvings of our churches.

The "Physiologus" begins with the lion as the king of beasts, and from that point onward deals in arbitrary order with every animal, bird, reptile, fish, actual or legendary, and points out moral and religious parallels. Thus it states of the eagle, whose form is so frequently used for the lectern, that, when it has grown old and its eyes have become dim and darkened, it flies upward towards the sun until it has scorched its wings and purged away the film from its eyes; then it descends to the earth and plunges three times into a spring of pure water. Thus it recovers its sight and renews its youth.

The eagle, so it is also said, can gaze at the bright sun without blinking, and is accustomed to carry its unfledged young on its wings upward and to compel them to

look upon the shining orb; those that can do so with open and steadfast eyes it rears, but discards the others and lets them fall to the ground. "Here," says the Physiologus, "the sun represents God the Father, upon whose face Christ can gaze undazzled by His glory, and to whom He presents the children of men who claim to have been born of Him; those who are able to stand before God and to look upon the light of His countenance are accepted, while the others are rejected."

Aristotle relates that the upper beak of very old eagles grows so long as to prevent them from eating and causes them to die of hunger. In the Greek version of the Physiologus of the twelfth century the author adds that, in order to remedy this evil and to avert this danger, the eagle breaks off the superfluity of its beak against a stone, a statement which is adduced by homilists and exegetists to prove that the rock of salvation is the only cure for the growth of carnal-mindedness, and the sole means of preventing spiritual starvation! And it is to this curious lore that we owe the Eagle lectern so commonly seen in our churches to-day, and of which a particularly fine example of the

Perpendicular order exists at Lower Bebington. Other finely carved lecterns of the eagle type are at Backford and Stoak. The eagle was the favourite choice right through the Middle Ages as an emblem wherewith to crown the lectern used for gospel reading purposes. Some of the Fathers regarded it as typical of the resurrection (Psalm ciii. 5).

The eagle is also the special symbol of St. John the Divine, because the Evangelist dwells specially in his Gospel and Revelation on the glory of the Sun of Righteousness. Strange to say, this symbol did not excite the ire of vandal Protestants as did the sight of the cross or crucifix, and, when the monks flung their valuable brass eagles into the nearest pond, as they did in several instances, it was for the object of cheating the commissioners of some of their spoil, and not through fear of the lecterns being mutilated or destroyed. There was a revival of the use of eagle lecterns in the XVIIth century, but more especially after the Restoration of the church and king. The surviving specimens are chiefly of the XVth and early XVIth centuries.

An interesting lectern is in use at Shot-

wick. It is an old fiddler's stand, a relic of the days when the choir was led by fiddles, bassoons, and clarionets. A ledge near the bottom of the stand shows where the violoncello or bass viol rested.

In many churches the chancel screen exhibits very beautiful carving. Its origin is to be found in the old custom of hanging a veil during Lent in front of the altar, so as to cut it off from the rest of the building during the forty days. This solemn Lenten veiling was but the reflection of what had once been the more primitive method of mysteriously shrouding the place of the Sacramental Presence from the main body of the church all the year round; and a use that had once prevailed unceasingly became relegated to a season of extra solemnity.

Finally a permanent screen, with a convenient door in the centre, took its place to prevent undue intrusion into the sanctuary.

Wood-carving has always been lavishly bestowed upon screen work in our parish churches, but unfortunately little that is old now remains in Wirral. The destruction of screens in the Reformation period

was due, not to any particular objection to their presence in the church, but because they were generally surmounted by the Rood, and in the removal of the latter the screens were often damaged beyond repair. Such a screen once stood at Bebington. At the present time the chancel arch and side arches of this church are filled with modern screen work, but the wide piers of the chancel arch fortunately retain indications of the screen which formerly adorned the church.

The only other old screen in Wirral is at Woodchurch. Nevertheless many of the modern screens are very beautiful, particularly those at Bebington and Eastham, where they serve to

> *" Keep the charm of not too much,*
> *Part seen, imagined part,"*

and give an atmosphere of mystery and beauty beyond. As Pugin, the great architect, said, " The man who professes to love Gothic architecture and does not like screens is a liar."

At Thurstaston, which, as has already been observed, is a copy of Mid-Gothic, the screen work is of stone, a very uncommon feature.

Alms boxes are often adorned with quaint carving, though Wirral cannot boast anything of particular value in this respect. The best perhaps is at West Kirby. They are however of historical interest. The earliest mention of the use of boxes in places of worship for the reception of the offerings of the worshippers occurs in the second book of the Kings of Israel, in which we are told that "Jehoiada the priest, took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar," from which it may be inferred that it was intended for the collection of offerings for the maintenance of the temple. The provision of similar boxes probably became usual in churches at an early period in the history of the Christian Church, the giving of alms for the poor being so ancient a practice that it soon became convenient to have a receptacle for them. The period is as yet undetermined when offerings for sacred and charitable purposes began to be collected from the people whilst assembled within the walls of the church, nor is the mode by which such collections were first effected at all clear and well defined. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) ordered a

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

ALMS DISH
BACKFORD CHURCH

trunk to be placed in every church, to receive alms for the remission of the sins of the donors; and Fosbroke says that poor-boxes in churches are often mentioned in the XIIth century.

But these money chests were for the reception of free gifts made without personal application, and were altogether as distinct in purpose as they were in form from the collecting bags, dishes, and boxes, which, in our time, have been handed from pew to pew for the benevolent to drop their coins into. "When did these erratic ecclesiastical receptacles come into vogue?" is a question easier asked than replied to. The first Reformed Prayer-book of the Church of England (1549) provided certain sentences of Holy Scripture "to bee song whiles the people doo offer" during the Communion or Mass. But no collecting of the alms by wardens or clerk was contemplated, for a rubric after the sentence says, "In the meanetyme, whyles the Clerkes do syng the Offertory, so many as are disposed shall offer unto the poor mennes boxe every one accordynge to his habilitie and charitable mynde." Probably the con-

fusion that arose from the congregation gathering round the fixed poor-box caused this direction to be shortly repealed.

In the second Reformed Prayer-book (1552), it is ordered that "Then shal the Churche wardens or some other by them appointed, gather the devotion of the people and put the same into the pore mens boxe." The rubric providing that the alms were to be collected "in a decent basin to be provided by the parish for that purpose" by the wardens, who were to "reverently bring it to the priest," is only of 1662 date. "Latten or pewter dishes or basins were the usual receptacles provided by the wardens for collecting purposes" (Cox and Harvey).

Bread boards, on which loaves are placed in several of our old churches where these charities were or are still extant, survive at West Kirby, Thurstaston, Bebington, Eastham, and Woodchurch, and exhibit interesting carving. They are generally inscribed with the name of the benefactor of the charity, and date from the early XVIIIth century. The most beautiful of these is in the tower Vestry at Bebington, where are also to be seen

1.

2.

Photographs by W. H. Tomkinson

1. OLD BREAD BOARD, BEBINGTON
2. MISERICORD, BEBINGTON

several misericords and stall ends, which some day may be built into some church ornament and further beautify a building which is already unique.

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CHAPTER XIII.

HATCHMENTS AND HERALDIC PANELS IN WIRRAL CHURCHES.

" Heraldry is so noble, useful, and entertaining a Science, that scarce any of those Studies which are considered as polite and ornamental, can lay a juster claim to the attention of Noblemen and Gentlemen. For it presents to their view the Origin and Foundation of those Titles and Dignities, which distinguish them from the rest of mankind; and serves not only to transmit to Posterity the Glory of the heroic Actions, or meritorious Deeds of their Ancestors, but also to illustrate historical Facts, towards establishing their Rights and Prerogatives."

Porny.

THE word " Hatchment " is a corruption of the term " Achievement," both being heraldic expressions denoting the emblazonment of the full armorial bearings of any person. " Hatchment "

is a comparatively modern term, though the custom of carrying Coats-of-Arms is of very ancient origin; for it was not until the XVIth and XVIIth centuries that there arose the vogue of setting up the actual shield of a deceased person in the church of the parish to which he or she belonged.

This custom appears to have begun by carrying the ceremonial shields and helmets in the funeral processions. Fox Davies in his "Complete Guide to Heraldry" says, "Immediately upon the death of a person of any social position, a hatchment of his or her Arms was set up over the entrance to the house, which remained there for twelve months, during the period of mourning. It was then taken down from the house and removed to the church, where it was set up in perpetuity."

This hatchment was generally a diamond-shaped frame, painted black and enclosing a copy in oils of the armorial bearings of the deceased person, and Wirral, in common with other parts of England, contains several fine examples. Some of these, such as those of the Bunbury family at Stoak, and that of the

Congreve family at Burton, are treasured as valuable historical relics, but there appears to have been no obligation on the part of the Incumbents either to consent to the erection of such hatchments, or to permit them to remain where they were originally placed, and in some churches they have been relegated to the choir vestry or even to the coal house or rubbish heap, though such contumely as the latter does not seem to have overtaken any of the Wirral hatchments that exist to-day.

Nevertheless, those at Stoak and Backford, which are the finest in Wirral, had a narrow escape from absolute destruction. They were painted by members of the Holme family of Chester, who were renowned for their skill in the execution of heraldic work. Three of the family all bearing the name of Randle were specially distinguished. Randle Holme, the first (c. 1571-1655), was Deputy to the College of Arms, and was Mayor of Chester in 1633, while his son Randle Holme, the second (1601-1659), was Mayor of Chester in 1643. His son, Randle Holme, the third (1627-1704), was the author of a large heraldic work now very rare, entitled "An Academie of Armoury, or a Store

House of Armoury and Blazon," printed at Chester. He was "Sewer of the Chamber" in extraordinary to Charles II, and Deputy to the College of Arms for Cheshire, Lancashire, and North Wales. It was this Randle Holme who was responsible for the hatchments at Stoak and Backford, but, because he assumed certain duties which violated the rights of the College of Heralds, he was prosecuted by them at the suit of Sir William Dugdale, then Norroy King of Arms. Randle Holme lost the suit, and Dugdale had the satisfaction of visiting the churches where Holme's work was exhibited, and defacing the hatchments which he had illegally painted. For reasons unknown, this modern Ezra omitted to visit Stoak and Backford, with the result, more satisfactory to posterity, that Randle's work there has been preserved. Afterwards the quarrel was made up, Holme apparently submitting to the authority of the heralds, for he was appointed their deputy as we have seen for Cheshire, Lancashire, and North Wales.

The origin of Coats-of-Arms is lost in antiquity, and grave and learned discussions have arisen as to whether the practice

was the rule in Assyrian, Chaldean, Egyptian, Greek, or Roman times. In this country, the wearing of a distinctive badge in battle or tournament became necessary by reason of the introduction of the closed helmet, which hid the face of the wearer and rendered him unrecognisable even to his followers. And so the knights of olden times wore a decorated sur-coat of distinctive design, or a device upon their shield, or a crest upon their helmet, to establish their identity. It is an interesting reflection that, in the present utilitarian age, the army "identity disc" is the modern counterpart of the old heraldic ornaments.

But there was one essential difference between the armorial bearings and the identity disc, for, while every man of every rank wore the latter, Arms were borne only by gentlemen. The word "gentleman," of course, had a totally different meaning in mediæval days from what it has now. Then there were but two classes of society, landowners and the common people. Landowners had certain military obligations. They held land on condition that they produced a specific number of men-at-arms as the sovereign

required, and they were in consequence the "officers" of their followers. As military officers they were obliged to carry arms, and, as we have seen, this necessitated the wearing of distinctive signs. Thus Coats-of-Arms became the symbol of the technical rank of gentility, and the possession of Arms to-day is a matter of hereditary privilege, one who can prove descent from a bearer of Arms being permitted to carry them, if he can support the style and customs usual among gentle people.

Naturally there have been attempts to support Arms without proper title, and this illegal assumption began at an early date. In the reign of Henry VI a very stringent proclamation was issued on the subject; and, in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and her successors, the Kings of Arms were commanded to make perambulations throughout the country for the purpose of pulling down and defacing improper Arms, of recording Arms properly borne by authority, and of compelling those who used Arms without authority to obtain authority for them or discontinue their use. These perambulations were termed Visitations.

The Crest, which is now associated with a Coat-of-Arms, and which is its highest part, had a separate and distinctive origin. The word is derived from the Latin "Crista," signifying a "comb or tuft," such as many birds have upon their heads. Fox Davies says, "we must go back, once again, to the bedrock of the peacock-popinjay vanity ingrained in human nature. The same impulse which nowadays leads to the decoration of the helmets of the Lifeguards with horsehair plumes and regimental badges, the cocked hats of field-marshals and other officers with waving plumes, the Képis of commissionaires and the smashed hats of Colonial irregulars with cocks' feathers, the hat of the poacher and gamekeeper with a pheasant's feather, led unquestionably to the "decoration" of the helmets of the armoured knights of old. The matter was just a combination of decoration and vanity. At first they frequently painted their helmets, and as with the gradual evolution and crystallisation of armory a certain form of decoration (the device upon his shield) became identified with a certain person, that particular device was used for

the decoration of the helmet and painted thereupon."

The precise significance of the crest appears open to question, many asserting that no one below the rank of a knight was entitled to wear one, this statement being based on the theory that the crest was not worn in battle, but only in tournament. The lesser gentry, being obliged to fight in war, bore arms of necessity, but made no pretension to the use of the crest, and this mode appears to have been maintained up to the xvth century. Thereafter the granting of crests to ancient arms became a frequent practice.

There are eight main classes into which all Coats-of-Arms may be divided. They are as follows :—

1.—Arms of Dominion or Sovereignty, which are borne by Emperors, Kings, and sovereign states.

2.—Arms of Pretension are those of territories to which a Sovereign or Lord makes claim, although they may be possessed by others.

Thus the Kings of England quartered the Arms of France with their own from the time when Edward III laid claim to the crown of France until the year 1801.

3.—Arms of Concession, or as they are sometimes called "Augmentations of Honour," are either entire arms or figures upon a previous coat given by the sovereign as a reward for special service. Thus Queen Anne granted to Rear Admiral Sir Cloudesly Shovel a chevron between two Fleur-de-lys and a Crescent, to be placed upon his shield to denote the victories he gained over the French and Turks respectively.

4.—Arms of Community are those of cities, universities, societies, and other corporate bodies.

5.—Paternal-arms, or Arms of Families, form perhaps the biggest group. They constitute the distinguishing mark of a particular family, and no other person is suffered to assume those Arms, wrongful assumption being a punishable offence.

6.—Arms of Patronage, borne by Governors of Provinces, Lords of Manors, Patrons of Benefices, etc., as a token of their rights and jurisdiction.

7.—Arms of Alliance are those which families take up and join to their own to denote alliances they have contracted by marriage. Many examples occur in Wirral churches, for instance the Birch-Congreve hatchment in Burton church, and the Bunbury Panels in Stoak church where are exhibited the combined Arms of Stanney, Aldersey, Barton, Stalker, Bonville, Skeffington, Oldbeiffe, Stanhope, Childe, Malvell, Longvilliers, Rodiford, Bunbury, etc.

8.—Arms of Succession are those that are taken up by one who inherits estates bearing arms. If the legatee already possesses arms, the new ones are impaled or quartered with their own.

To these eight classes Porny naively adds a ninth, which he calls "Assumptive Arms," "such," says he, "as are taken up by the caprice or fancy of Upstarts, who being advanced to a degree of Fortune, assume them without having deserved them by any glorious action. This, indeed, is a great abuse of Heraldry; but yet so common, and so

much tolerated, almost everywhere, that little or no notice is taken of it and in process of time such Arms become true marks of distinction."

Turning now to the component parts of a Coat-of-Arms, we note that they may consist of six figures : the crest, the torse, the helmet, the mantling or lambrequin, the shield, the supporters, and the scroll. Of these the shield is the principal part, for on it are depicted the particular signs and emblems which the bearer carries, the augmentations of honour which the sovereign has conferred, the quarterings inherited from families, the impalement of marriage, and the different marks which are expressive of cadency. The shape of the shield is arbitrary and has no special significance, save that the lozenge, or diamond-shaped shield, is reserved for women.

Surmounting the shield is the helmet. The helmet was formerly worn as a defensive weapon to cover the bearer's head, and so it comes to be placed over a Coat-of-Arms as its chief ornament. Helmets are distinguished by their kind, form, and position, those of sovereigns being gold,

those of princes and lords of silver figured with gold, and those of private gentlemen of polished steel. The first three of these groups show the helmet open, faced and grated; an open face without bars denotes a knight; and the closed helmet is for esquires and gentlemen. Lastly, the helmet faces to the front for royalty, and in profile for those below that rank. Women, with the exception of sovereignty, are not permitted to surmount their arms with a helmet.

Surrounding the shield is often to be seen ornamentation in the form of flowers and leaves. These are relics of cloth coverings which were worn by knights to protect their heads from the weather. Porny states that going into battle with these coverings, they often came away with them hanging about them in a ragged condition, occasioned by the cuts they had received, and that the more hacked they were the more honourable they were accounted. Fox Davies sees in this "Mantling" the primeval prototype of the "puggaree," which the British soldiers wear to-day over their helmets in hot countries, a practice originating in the Crusades.

Between the helmet and the crest which stands upon it, is the Torse or twisted fillet. This is a relic of those favours which ladies were wont in the days of chivalry to reward a knight for valour. Such a token would take the form of a ribbon or handkerchief, which the knight would twine round his helmet, so that, just as the conventional slashings of the lambrequin hinted at past hard fighting in battle, so did the conventional torse suggest past service to and favour of ladies, love and war being the occupation of the perfect knight of romance.

In the Royal Arms which are hung in several of the Wirral churches, there are the figures of the lion and the unicorn supporting the shield. These are called "Supporters" and are to be traced back to the tournament days, when knights had their shields carried by servants under the disguise of lions, bears, griffins, etc. They also held and guarded the escutcheons, which the knights were obliged to expose to public view before the lists were opened. In this country a somewhat fictitious importance has become attached to supporters, owing to their almost exclusive reservation to the

highest rank. There can be no doubt that originally they were in this country little more than mere decorative and artistic appendages, devised and altered from time to time by different artists according as the necessities of the moment demanded.

The last item on a Coat-of-Arms that remains to be considered is the scroll, which is placed below the shield and on which is written the motto. "Many writers," says Fox Davies, "have traced the origin of mottoes to the 'slogan,' or war-cry of battle, and there is no doubt whatever that instances can be found in which an ancient war-cry has become a family motto. For example one can refer to the Fitzgerald 'Crom-a-boo'; other instances can be found amongst some of the Highland families, but the fact that many well-known war-cries of ancient days never became perpetuated as mottoes, and also the fact that by far the greater number of mottoes, even at a much earlier period than the present day, cannot by any possibility have ever been used for or have originated with the purpose of battle-cries, inclines me to believe that such a suggested origin for the motto in general

is without adequate foundation. There can be little, if any, connection between the war-cry as such and the motto as such. The real origin would appear to be more correctly traced back to the badge.

A badge had nothing to do with battle, but generally partook of the nature of what old writers would call 'a quaint conceit,' which people devised as distinctions suggesting their family name, history or aspirations. Just as at the present time a man may, and often does, adopt a maxim upon which he will model his life, some pithy proverb, or some trite observation, without any question or reference to armorial bearings, so, in the old days, when learning was less diffuse, and when proverbs and sayings had a wider acceptance and vogue than at present, many families adopted for their use some form of words. We find these words carved on furniture, set up on a cornice, cut in stone, and embroidered upon standards and banners."

It is suggested, therefore, that it is to this custom that we should look for the beginning of the use of mottoes. As a general practice the use of mottoes in England did not become

common until the XVIIIth century. Mottoes, too, are not hereditary; no one is compelled to bear one, nor is any authority needed for the adoption of one.

So far this review of heraldic achievements has been very obvious and straight forward, and, were there little more to be learnt, the subject would be counted a very easy one. The complexity of the study rests with the enormous number of devices which are borne upon shields, and with the peculiar nomenclature of those devices. For heraldry has a language of its own which has come to us from France, an ancient and interesting vocabulary which has to be mastered, together with the rules pertaining to arms, before a shield can be "blazoned" or described.

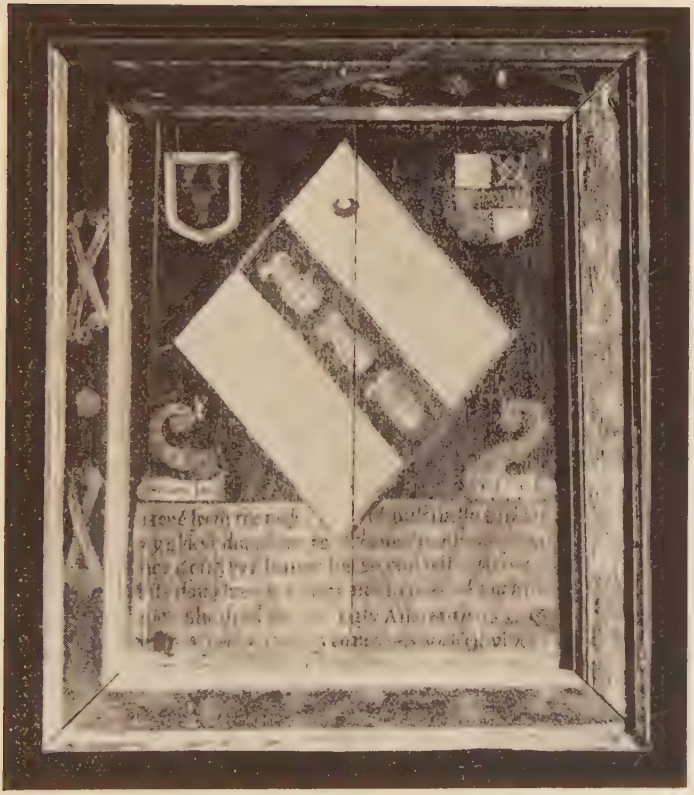
Within these pages, for example, there is reproduced a framed panel which hangs upon the south wall of Stoak church. This is described in an article in the Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, entitled "The Monumental and other Inscriptions in the Churches of Stoak, Backford, etc," by Paul J. Ryland, F.S.A., and F. C. Beazley, F.S.A., and reads as follows:—

"A frame decorated with rosettes and cross-bones, and

having cherubim at the corners. Arms: on a lozenge Bunbury, with a crescent Sable for difference. On the dexter side of the lozenge is a small shield, Sable, three garbs Or within a bordure Argent (Birkenhead). On the sinister side of the lozenge is a like shield quarterly, 1st and 4th Argent 2nd and 3rd Gules, a fret Or; over all a fesse Azure (Norres)."

It is safe to assume that to the vast majority of people such technical descriptions are so much "Greek," nevertheless they may form a point from which a view of heraldry may be obtained and an interest in its study aroused. It is not of course possible, nor is it within the scope of the present writer to attempt a learned dissertation upon that study. This little manual is not intended for antiquarians. It is an ordinary book written by an ordinary person for ordinary people, and its writer has no other aim than to present in a readable form some of the many and varied interests which attach themselves to our old parish churches, and it is because he himself has so often fixed his mystified gaze upon heraldic emblems that he ventures now to illuminate those mysteries with some of the light which he has received.

It is to be noted, then, in the first place that a shield always has a definite colour which is called "the field," which con-



Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

HERALDIC PANEL
(Bunbury—Birkenhead—Norres)
STOAK CHURCH

stitutes the ground of the shield, and these colours are given antique names. The commonest in use are the following :—

Gold	- which is called -		Or
Silver	,,	,,	Argent
Red	,,	,,	Gules
Blue	,,	,,	Azure
Black	,,	,,	Sable
Green	,,	,,	Vert
Purple	,,	,,	Purpure

On this field, plain, or divided by partition lines, are placed the various devices or " charges " to which the holder of the Coat-of-Arms is entitled.

These devices are, of course, limitless in number and variety, but, as a general rule it will be observed that the older the family the simpler is the device borne. For obviously as Coats-of-Arms became multiplied in the passage of the centuries, it became increasingly difficult to differentiate between them.

The earliest charges would appear to have been suggested by the structure of the shield. Ancient shields were often made of leather stretched on a wooden frame, and the shape of this frame with its bars, cross-pieces, and struts can clearly be

seen in the "bars," "bends," "crosses," "pales," "chevrons," "bordures," etc., which formed some of the oldest devices used. Of other charges the representation of the lion is perhaps the oldest as well as the most popular. Sometimes a charge is a pun on the bearer's name. Thus the Beeston family carry three bees on their scutcheon, and the charge on the Sylvester arms is a tree. Both these are seen on the Stoak panels. They are called "Canting Arms."

The Arms of a family can, of course, only be borne by its head, but relatives may carry them, subject to certain alterations, spoken of as "marks of cadency." Thus the heir may support the paternal arms if he places on the shield a device called a Label.

The Label.

Second sons may carry a small crescent; third sons a star or "mullet"; fourth sons a small bird called a "martlet," and so on, and when these additions are observed upon the field of any shield the fact is noted as being "for difference." Thus

on the arms pictured there is a black crescent to indicate that the bearer was a second child, the lozenge shaped shield showing her sex.

Many other marks of cadency are employed in heraldry, such as borders, partitions lines, cantons, etc. The so-called "Bar-sinister," believed to be a sign of bastardy, is a misnomer. For a "bar" in heraldry is a horizontal band which crosses the shield, and being horizontal it cannot, of course, be either right or left. A *bend*-sinister, that is a band from the top left hand corner of the shield to the right base, may denote illegitimacy, but it is not an inviolable rule. It is to be remarked that the terms "dexter" and "sinister" apply to the right and left of the shield as carried by the bearer, and not as observed by anyone standing in front of it.

When two or more Coats-of-Arms are conjoined upon one shield it is spoken of as a "Marshalling of Arms." There are three leading methods of doing this, namely by quartering, by superimposition, and by impalement, all of which are exemplified in the hatchments and panels hung up in the old Wirral churches.

The commonest method of marshalling is by *quartering*. It is well seen in the case of the Royal Arms which hang in several of the churches, it being once the custom to suspend them over the church doorways as a token of loyalty. Originally the English arms consisted of three golden lions in profile upon a red shield, or, to express it in heraldic language, "On a field Gules three lions passant Or." At the same time the Arms of France consisted of a blue field powdered with golden fleur-de-lys, and so when Edward III laid claim to the French crown he "quartered" the Arms of England with those of France, that is to say the English shield was divided by partition lines into four quarters two of which showed the English charges and two the French. This was in 1340-1405.

Then came the incorporation of the Arms of Scotland and Ireland with those of England, under the reign of James I. The Scottish Arms consisted of a gold shield on which was a red lion within a decorated frame of the same colour, that is to say "On a field Or a lion rampant within a tressure flory and counter flory both Gules." The Irish Arms were a

harp of gold on a field of blue, or, in heraldic parlance " Azure a harp Or with strings Argent." These shields were then quartered with those of England and France, thus making one of each on the whole field. Other examples of quartering are well seen in the panels in Stoak church.

Next came the occupation of the English throne by William of Orange and Mary, who brought with them the Arms of Nassau, " Azure powdered with billets gold and a lion gold." But these were not quartered with the English Arms, but placed on a small scutcheon in the centre of the great quartered shield of the Royal Arms of the Stewarts. This arrangement is called *Marshalling by Superimposition*, and it was in use, in this case, from 1688, the year of William's election, until 1702, the date of his death.

Queen Anne succeeded William, but being of the Stewart line she reverted to the Arms borne by James I, Charles I, Charles II, and James II. Then in the fifth year of her reign there was passed the Act of Union with Scotland, and the Royal Arms were altered. This time the Arms of England and Scotland were

united by *impalement* and placed in the first and fourth quarters of the shield, France being deposed from the pride of place it had held since 1405 and placed in the second quarter. The Arms of Ireland remained in the third quarter where they were originally placed. This shield is seen in the Royal Arms hung over the doorway of Thurstaston church. Marshalling by Impalement is also exemplified in the Congreve-Birch hatchment on the north wall of Burton church, and in the Beverley-Birkenhead Panel in Backford church.

With the accession of the Hanoverian kings the Royal Arms underwent a further change, and this time the ancient title of King of France was abandoned, and the French Arms disappeared for ever from the English shield on January 1st, 1801. In Shotwick church over the north doorway, now blocked up, there is a specimen of this style of the Royal Arms. The painting is now very dirty, but the white horse of the Arms of Westphalia can just be seen. The date of this panel can be fixed at 1714-1800, because the horse is in the fourth quarter and the Arms of France therefore occupy the second.

After 1801 the horse appears on a superimposed scutcheon in the centre of the great shield.

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CHAPTER XIV.

STAINED GLASS IN THE OLD PARISH CHURCHES OF WIRRAL.

" Lord how can man preach Thy eternal word
He is a britlle crazie glasse
Yet in Thy Temple then dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place
To be a window through Thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie
Making thy life to shine within
Thy holy preachers, then the light and Glorie
More reverent grows and more doth win :
Which els show waterish, bleak and thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light in one
When they combine and mingle, bring
A strong regard and aw; but speech alone
Doth vanish like a fearing thing,
And in the eare not conscience ring."

George Herbert.

(From an old window in West Kirby church, dated 1632).

THE history of the manufacture of stained glass is a very fascinating one. Pliny, the Roman historian, gives a picturesque theory of its discovery. He says that a merchant ship once touched on the coast of Syria, and the crew landed near the mouth of the river Belus, on a beach of fine white sand. "The ship's cargo consisted of Natron,—a natural alkaline crystal which was much used in ancient times for washing,—and the crew having lighted a fire on the sand used lumps of it from the cargo to prop up their kettle. What was their surprise to find afterwards a stream of molten glass running down from their camp-fire. In this case the natron acted as a flux and enabled the sand to melt in the heat of the camp-fire, which, however, must have been a very large and hot one." Yet, this could not have been the true origin of glass. The Chinese claim to have used white glass of a very superior quality upwards of 2,000 years before the Christian era; and, if we are to believe the report that glass was used by them in their astronomical instruments, we may be quite sure it was of excellent quality

or it would have been practically worthless for that important purpose.

Whether or no the Chinese made lenses of glass may be somewhat uncertain, but we know for a fact that the Egyptians made glass beads and jewels no less than 5,000 years ago. These jewels were of many colours, which were incorporated into the material itself, that is to say, actually stained glass. Later, we find that the Greeks made glass in imitation of onyx, agate, and some of the rarer kinds of marble; whilst the Romans also discovered a way of making a dark coloured glass from which they cut cameos. Then came glass for various patterns, shapes, colours, and uses, and also very beautiful glass mosaic for wall decoration. They did not, however, glaze their windows, though the Romans were at an early date in the habit of setting small panes of glass in bronze, copper, and even leaden frames, possibly for the purpose of mirrors.

St. Jerome and others of the early Fathers allude to painted glass, but probably these references are to medallions of glass with figures painted upon them which have been found in Greek excavations. The first coloured glass windows of

which there is any record seem to be those in Sta. Sophia's, Constantinople, pieces of coloured glass set in heavy leads, and resembling the class of work used for mosaic decoration in the same building. This was in the VIth century, and was as far as stained glass in the East ever got, the art henceforward developing in the West, finding in the church, that refuge of civilisation, the shelter it needed for its evolution. The exact date of the oldest stained window glass is not known, but by the XIIIth century the monks had become very busy with this work, executing many beautiful examples despite the poverty of their tools.

The most marked feature of this early glass work was the vast amount of lead employed in the construction of the painted windows, because each colour required a separate piece of glass for its representation, as many as sixty sometimes occurring within a square foot of border, yet so cleverly arranged is the leading that at a short distance it is quite unnoticeable, and simply serves to emphasise the pattern. It is to be borne in mind that the leads in use in early times, for the purpose of bringing

the various pieces of glass together, were very narrow, not more than $\frac{3}{16}$ of an inch in width, and very different in this respect from the leads in use up to within a comparatively recent date.

The beauty of stained glass is not, of course, destroyed by the presence of these black lines of lead and iron, on the contrary it gains enormously, for large pieces of unrelieved colour are trying to the eye, and the continual contrast of the metal work enables one to appreciate the brilliance and colour of the glass.

"All the early coloured glass with the exception of ruby," says Philip Nelson, "was formed of pot-metal glass, *i.e.* glass coloured throughout its substance by the addition to clear white glass of various mineral oxides. Ruby glass, upon the other hand, was merely a 'coated glass,' *i.e.* clear glass with a varying thickness of ruby glass superimposed, and was produced after the following fashion :— the workman, first having formed thereon a suitable mass, he then dipped it into a pot of ruby, and proceeded to blow the glass and spread it out into a sheet in the usual manner. By this means a sheet was pro-

duced, consisting mainly of clear glass, with a thin coating of ruby.

This exceptional method of manufacture was rendered necessary, because a sheet of glass, of ruby throughout, would appear black even in the strongest light. The colour of ruby glass is due to the addition of copper oxide to clear glass, but, owing to imperfections in productions, the ruby glass of early times was very streaky in character, a circumstance which rendered it more suitable for artistic effects. Probably the most remarkable variety among the colours of early glass is its wonderful blue, which, in its deeper shades, resembled the sapphire. This was largely used, as was also ruby, for the ground work of early paintings, the former, however, being employed more frequently.

Deep blue glass owed its colour to oxide of cobalt, its wonderful quality being probably due to the presence of arsenic, an impurity frequently met with in cobalt ores. In its lighter shades, this blue occurs somewhat rarely, and then usually only in draperies.

Turquoise blue also occurs, though not frequently ; it was formed from copper and

was most often used in foliage work and in draperies. The early greens varied very considerably in tone from a bright emerald to a dull olive, the former tint being formed from copper, the latter from iron. Purple brown occurred with very considerable variations in depth, and was formed from manganese either alone or in combination with iron; in its darker shades it occurred in draperies, whilst in its paler it formed the somewhat unsatisfactory flesh tint prevalent in early times. Yellow, which was derived from iron, was rather brassy in quality; it was used in foliage, borders, and in personal ornaments."

At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries a great deal of stained glass was wantonly destroyed, partly in the iconoclastic movement which threw over other forms of Church ornament, and partly for the sake of the leadwork. In those days ancient glass could be had for the asking.

Turning now to review stained glass windows in the old churches of Wirral, we first note that of old glass there is very little. In the porch at Woodchurch, and in the east window, are some ancient

fragments; in the east windows at Shotwick are some small pieces inset into the upper portion of the lights, which give some idea of the beauty of the old colouring; and in the vestry at West Kirby is a curious, though not beautiful, window dated 1632.

But of modern art there are many fine and interesting specimens, and these may be described briefly in geographical order :

St. Bridget's, West Kirby.

The east window is particularly noteworthy not only for the beauty of its glass, but for the extraordinary design of its tracery. It is said to be of the same style as many that stand in the monastic ruins of the south of Ireland, and that there is only one other church in England, namely, Shifnal, Staffordshire, having a window with similar tracery. The window has five lights, each containing four figures. They are as follows :—

The centre light, Our Lord's Ascension, St. John the Baptist, Ceadda, Our Lord Crucified.

To the extreme left, St. Stephen, David, Isaiah, St. Oswald.

To the left of the central light, St. Peter, St. Augustine, Noah, Mary the Mother of Our Lord.

To the right of the centre, St. Paul, St. Cecilia, Moses, St. John the Beloved Disciple.

To the extreme right, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Jerome, St. George, and St. Werburgh.

The north wall of the nave is pierced by some very fine windows executed by Kempe. That next to the organ bears the following inscription :—

> "To the glory of God and in affectionate memory of Henry Bell who died Nov. 2nd 1891 : and of Frances Bell his wife who died Jan. 11th 1878, and of Elizabeth Eccles Bell their daughter who died April 26th 1890 this window is dedicated."

It is a two-light window. On the right is St. Simon, to the left St. Ambrose with bishop's mitre and crozier.

In the middle of the north wall is another two-light window, representing St. Richard, Bishop of Chichester, and St. Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary. The former is usually represented with a chalice at his feet; the legend states that he fell once during the celebration of Holy

Communion, and that the wine was miraculously retained in the cup which he held. St. Elizabeth is pictured charitably pouring out water in relief of suffering. Below the window is the inscription :—

> "We pray you remember Elizabeth Barton who entered into rest Jan. 27th, 1890, to whose dear memory Alfred and Ellen Barton of Caldy Manor have caused this window to be made."

To the left of the north doorway is a three-light window picturing St. Patrick, St. Monica, and St. George. It bears the dedication :—

> "To the glory of God and to the Beloved memory of George de Landre Macdona and Elizabeth Macdona his wife of Hilbre House in this Parish, the father and mother of seven priests of the Church of England and Ireland, this window is erected by their children and grand children A.D. 1892."

Lastly should be observed the window to the right of the north doorway, put up in memory of Charles Dawson Brown. It represents St. Matthew with inkhorn and book; St. Peter with the keys; St. Luke with book, pen, and a winged ox; and St. Andrew with his typical saltire cross.

St. Peter's, Heswall.

There is some good stained glass in this church. The great east window of five lights is to the memory of the Rev. Mark Coxon, vicar, and was erected by his family. It depicts the crucifixon. Above and beneath are medallions with half figures of the Messianic Prophets : Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Micah, David, Solomon, and Hosea. In the circular lights on either side are the Angels of the Sun and Moon ; in the light above, the crossed swords of St. Paul, and the keys of St. Peter. In the large circular light, the Sacred Shield and around it the Implements of the Passion (the ladder, dice, head-dress, crown, robe, scourges, title, and the sponge and spear).

In the nave the most noteworthy windows are the following :—

In the north aisle a two-light window dedicated to Thomas and Catherine Thorburn. The figures are those of St. Thomas and St. Catherine respectively, the former with a book and spear, the latter with a sword, pen, book, and the wheel which is emblematic of her torture.

Also in the same aisle a two-light window dedicated to Henry Boyd and

Margaret his wife, representing St. Michael and St. George. At the west end of the church beneath the Tower, where are the Glegg monuments, is a very fine three-light window bearing the inscription :—

> "Giving thanks to God for the dear memory of Mary Adeline Brocklebank, eldest child of Thomas and Mary Petrena Brocklebank, who was born 20th of Jan. 1868, and fell asleep 2nd May 1888, this window is dedicated."

The three figures in this window are of St. John the Baptist in the centre light, St. Augustine on the left, and St. Ethelbert on the right.

In the chapel dedicated to St. Peter are three beautiful windows picturing episodes in the Apostle's life.

St. Helen's and St. Mary's, Neston.

Here are four exquisite windows by Burne-Jones and William Morris, three in the north wall, and one, perhaps the most beautiful of the set, in the south wall of the nave. The three-light window at the east end of the north wall is dedicated to David Russell, M.D., and pictures Enoch, David, and Elijah. The middle of the

three windows is to Reginald Bushell, and represents St. Paul standing beside the Athenian altar to the "unknown God," and St. Thomas carrying a carpenter's square. The third window in the north aisle commemorates John Gaitskell Churton. This and the one in the south aisle are symbolic representations of the Virtues. The figures of Justice and Humility, which are in the south aisle, are said to be among the most perfect designs ever executed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

St. Oswald's, Backford.

The best windows in this church are by Frampton. Among these may be specially noted the single-light window in the south aisle picturing Our Lord as the Good Shepherd; the two-light window in the same aisle, near the chancel, erected by Elizabeth Blomfield, of Mollington Hall, in memory of her sister; and the east window in the south aisle, a single light picturing the Resurrection.

St. Mary's, Eastham.

In this church is to be seen Kempe's best work, and of this the finest constitutes

Photograph by W. H. Tomkinson

BURNE-JONES WINDOWS
NESTON PARISH CHURCH

a wonderful series of the Old Testament Heroes. They are arranged in chronological order under the title of Patriarchs, Judges, Priests, Kings, and Prophets. The first of this series is a two-light window at the west end of the north aisle. It represents Abraham holding the roll of the Covenant, and Noah carrying a miniature ark. Below is the dedication :—

> "In Honour of God and the faith of the Patriarchs certain of the Parishioners dedicate this window."

The second of the series is in the north aisle, a three-light window picturing Moses with the Table of the Commandments, Joshua in Armour and bearing the device of the sun and moon upon his shield (Josh. x. 12, 13), and Samuel with a Roll of the Law and a horn of consecrating oil. This window is dedicated as follows :—

> "To the Praise of God who raised up Judges for his people, Moses, Joshua and Samuel, and in memory of Mary Duckworth, who died Sep. 1st 1888, aged 75 this window is dedicated."

It was the first window by Kempe to be erected in Wirral.

The third in the series pictures Aaron

with his breast-plate, rod and censer, Melchizedek with orb and sacrificial vessels, and Zacharias in the official priestly dress. Below is a tablet with the following inscription :—

> "Giving thanks to God who has made known the Law of Sacrifice in His Priests, Melchizedek, Aaron, and Zacharias, and in memory of Cicely Anne and Jane Birley their sister Josephine Chambres dedicates this window A.D. 1889."

The fourth window in the set represents the three principal kings of the Old Testament: David, Solomon, and Hezekiah. The first bears a psalter and harp; the second a sceptre and a book of wisdom; and the third, a sceptre and a sundial (2 Kings xx. 11). It bears the simple dedication :—

> "Giving glory to the King of Kings and as a Thank Offering."

The last of the five windows pictures the three great Prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel, and is dedicated in the following words :—

> "To the goodness of God who hath spoken unto us by His Prophets and in memory of His servant Clara, the beloved wife of Thomas Henry Bebington of this Parish. Died 28 Dec. 1889."

St. Andrew's, Bebington.

The finest stained glass in this church is to be found in the two grand eight-light Perpendicular windows in the south aisle. They picture the following Biblical characters: Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, Esther, Mary (the mother of Our Lord), Elizabeth, Mary of Bethany, and Dorcas, in the one window; and Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Sts. Peter, Matthew, Andrew, and John, in the other. All the figures are canopied.

St. Oswald's, Bidston.

Three windows in this church should be noticed. At the east of the south wall is a two-light window painted in the Burne-Jones style. In the middle of the same wall is a representation of the Adoration of the Madonna, executed in something of the mediæval manner; and at the west end of the same wall, a two-light window representing St. Cecilia and St. Oswald.

Woodchurch.

The old glass in the porch has already been noted. The east window contains

some old fragments, set as ovals, which were brought from a monastic church in France. For the rest the finest window is probably that by Kempe, to the left of the main entrance, dedicated to the memory of the Rev. George King, a former Rector of Woodchurch, who died March 7th, 1862, aged 81 years, and to Catherine, his daughter. Punning on the name, the artist has pictured the great kings of the Bible, in six lights.

The present author cannot hope that this selection of windows in Wirral will meet every taste, for the just appreciation of stained glass is difficult, and judgment with regard to it more than ordinarily fallible. There must inevitably be times of day, for example, when the position of the sun is not favourable to a particular window. It often happens that glass is seen under such conditions that the brilliancy of the windows on one side of the church is literally put out by a flood of light poured in upon them through the windows on the opposite side, and the best of critics could not appreciate stained glass under such circumstances. Experience

naturally teaches one to make allowances, but he can only judge what he has seen, and it is only with the light shining through a window that he can see its colour or appreciate its effect. As a matter of fact, we rarely see stained glass at its best, for the effect of glass depends upon the absence of light other than that which comes through it, and every other ray which penetrates into a building does injury to the colouring. It is comparable to hearing a symphony only in snatches, or as if a more powerful orchestra was all the while drowning the sound.

"Something of course of our appreciation," says Day, "depends upon the frame of mind in which we come to the windows. They may be one of the sights of the place; but the sight-seeing mood is not the one in which to appreciate. How often can the tourist sit down in a church with the feeling that he has all the day before him, and can give himself up to the enjoyment of the glass and wait till it has something to say to him? A man has not seen glass when he has walked round the church, with one eye upon it and the other upon his watch, not even though he may have made a note or two concerning it.

You must give yourself up to it, or it will never give up to you the secret of its charm."

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